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FEAR

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STAR GAZING

At last, *Star Trek: The Next Generation* will hit our television screens in September as the Beeb bows to pressure from fans and aims the continuing adventures of the

Starship Enterprise.

For science fiction enthusiasts the series will fill the gap left by cult series such as *Blake's 7* and, possibly, *Doctor Who*. It could also act as a further echo of the SF battle-cry in the UK. Truly, SF fans had a raw deal during the Eighties when horror held sway, but with so many science fiction releases happening this year, plus the number of events on the calendar, we can look forward to a revitalisation of this genre.

The big news is on the SF publishing front which has slowly stagnated during the past decade. True, the masters such as Isaac Asimov and John Brunner have continued to be published, we've had so-called new waves, such as Cyberpunk, but publishers have been pretty lax in their packaging and promotion.

This year, however, we have two major publishing launches which should put SF back on the intergalactic map. March sees the launch of Mandarin's new SF list with a stunningly packaged bundle of titles, including big sellers such as Ben Bova, CJ Cherryh and James Patrick Kelly.

Mandarin is also splashing out on a fantastic promotional competition in which you could win a trip to a major SF convention in Holland. More details can be found in this issue of **FEAR**.

Pan has the highest profile launch with an author tour for its initial six gangle-blasting titles and a huge amount of promotional material. The tour begins in April and concludes at Easicon in Liverpool. Pan intends to have T-shirts, badges and posters at all the signing sessions – which will begin with a mega-signing at Forbidden Planet – so there'll be plenty of over-the-counter material to remind you of their books.

Sounds like a bumper year for those who like to read, but film buffs are, again, likely to have a disappointing one, despite the promise of several American-made movies last year. The only vaguely

SF-oriented thriller on the cards is *Hardware*, a Palace Pictures production which, for all the shooting information magazines such as **FEAR** have received, appears to have been lensed on a closed set! It was also the only major British genre film – apart from *Nightbreed* – to go into production at Pinewood last year.

Still, as SF blossoms in other mediums, let's not get too maudlin.

Finally to our Prime Evil short story competition. We're hoping to have a final result in the July issue but a deluge of 500 entries has kept us judges busy for several months since the competition closed last December.

The general standard of writing has been quite high and picking the winners is proving difficult... but not impossible. So look forward to a Prime Evil special in a future **FEAR**.

"This year, however, we have two major publishing launches which should put SF back on the intergalactic map"

John Gilbert

PA



PARANOIA

Orgies, incest and social injustice: Society is a horror film more jam-packed with messages than a dozen mainstream movies. Director Brian Yuzna unravels just a few of them for FEAR's John Gilbert.

These films ain't always what they used to be and, in the case of *Society*, that's just as well, because the original film did not contain the wonderful special effects emphasis that makes the released version so special.

According to director Brian Yuzna, he was first approached by scriptwriters Woody Keith and Rick Fry with a slightly different story, 'about a boy, Billy, who has everything going for him, but feels alienated. He hears a tape recording of his parents and sister, someone is killed on it . . . his parents are involved in a blood cult.'

'I liked the themes of paranoia and incest, and we worked in a new angle, something that was more fantastic. Instead of the traditional cult, we had people meld together in communion.'

Yuzna's first crew appointment was Screaming Mad George, a special effects master who worked on *Polltergeist 2*, *Fright Night 2*, *Big Trouble In Little China* and the *Nightmare On Elm Street* saga.

George, a big Dali fan, was soon helping the director come up with surrealistic ideas and visual puns, such as the grotesque sexual act known as The Shunt. Yuzna also wanted to include political statements and visual puns, like 'The head giving head in *Re-Animator*'.

A *Society* history was also developed for the film, but it was

not shown on screen. 'The history was not explicit in the film but there was a parallel evolution in caveman times where a genetic mutation affected a small number of people who dominated the others. Kings, sultans, pharaohs and bosses of whatever culture interbred throughout history and

incestuously created a ruling class.

'They are, quite literally, blue bloods who evolved parallel to us. I personally believe that we can never escape the class we are born in.' Yuzna goes further, asserting that presidents and prime ministers have no real power, but that society owns everything.



"Kings, sultans, pharaohs and bosses of whatever culture interbred throughout history and incestuously created a ruling class"

Family plot: Billy (Billy Warlock, left) suspects that his parents are involved in a sinister blood cult. Twisted sister: Billy's double-jointed sibling (right)



rather like the two hundred families in France, and operates within its own set of rules. 'We don't know who they are but, for instance, the Kennedys are too new to be part of society, and many of today's great families haven't interbred for long enough.'

BEYOND BLOOD

The director sees his Society as a burlesque combination of the political, economic and horrific, an anthem to alienated youth. It is yet another step forward in his unique filmmaking career, of which *Re-Animator* was only the start – albeit an outrageous one. 'Re-Animator was flat-out horror and didn't really get beyond horror. From *Beyond* tried digging a little deeper. There were people who were outraged by *Re-Animator* but, because of the critical reaction, they had to back off. My impulse is always to give audiences as much as possible, to be original, to make it worthwhile to sit through it. After all, there's a lot of movies out there.'

Yuzna continues to be controversial because the horror genre is becoming more acceptable and the only way it will continue to thrive is by breaking new ground. 'Part of the development of the genre is that people want to see new things, see things that they don't see in their regular lives. In the Seventies, until *Star Wars* came

along, science fiction wasn't a legitimate genre. People talked about SF the way they talk about horror these days. Science fiction is now considered mainstream entertainment, but it had to evolve to get to that blockbuster, and now everybody is doing science fiction.'

'I think that, by breaking the taboos and breaking out of the old ways, we're seeing a natural progression of an art form, and that reflects the times. In the Eighties, everything was going in a puritanical direction but now I think that people in the arts are trying to push it further in the other direction.'

Society was left uncensored by the British Board Of Film Classification, because of its surrealism, the obvious use of prosthetics and lack of real blood. 'I didn't want to use the colour red. There was one place where there's a kid dead in a car and that's phoney. I wanted the images to be outrageous, and if you put blood in them they just become gory. Even when we pulled the guy inside out there were no lungs etc. After all, it wasn't the insides of bodies we wanted to portray but the insides of minds.'

SEX, THE BRIDE AND SURREALISM

Although the movie's special effects sequences were scripted

before production, Brian Yuzna allowed Screaming Mad George a great deal of freedom for the orgy sequence.

George cites Salvador Dali as his mentor, and the brand of special effects used results in some very surrealistic scenes which rely more on the FX man's mind than on any inherent physical techniques. Yuzna is ecstatic about the results. 'Most special effects for films are done using EC comics-style foam latex. George has an art school background. He's a big fan of Dali, so when we began to work on Society he pulled out a Dali book, and all the sculpture is based on him.'

The special effects continued to evolve as the story was put onto film and George turned some fairly wacky creatures into wacked-out ones! Butthead, the amalgamation of Billy's parents and sister, is a good example of the evolution process and of how George operates. 'Rick Fry originally wrote two buttocks connected in the middle, but George suggested legs and a butt.'

SIMPLY

SOCIETY

Starring: Billy Warlock, Devin Devasquez, Evan Richards, Ben Meyerson
Director Brian Yuzna
Distributor Medusa
Cert 18

From the moment I saw this film I had no doubts: it gets my vote for Movie Of The Year, and that's with nine months left to go. I just cannot see how any film could be more disturbing, more perverse or more sexually provocative and unashamedly inventive, and get away uncensored with an 18 certificate. The story is so simple – probably the only reason it hasn't been done before is that, where horror films are concerned, most US directors still have their horizons firmly fixed on gory bloodbaths.

Here we have Billy, heir apparent of a wealthy American family, who should be looking forward to instant access to the echelons of power. Instead, he's scared, scared of his family, friends, surroundings, and even his psychiatrist who just seems too helpful to be true. He even thinks that he's adopted, but is equally quite happy believing that his head is screwed up. Not until a friend plays him a tape in which his sister is being told the details of her perverse coming out party does he realise that something weird is taking place. When that friend is apparently killed in a car accident, Billy begins to realise that he cannot trust any one, that in society he is an outsider and the victim of a cruel game.

"I didn't want to use the colour red... I wanted the images to be outrageous... if you put blood in them they just become gory"



Yuzna has continued his quest for the unusual and downright perverse with *The Bride Of The Re-Animator* – a sequel to the original cult movie – that brings Jeffrey Coombes back as Herbert West. It is, as Yuzna is quick to point out, a gloriously gothic send-up with more than a little help from horror films past. 'It's an interesting

problem, to tell a new story and still keep enough of the original film to satisfy the fans.

'It's a homage to *The Bride Of Frankenstein*, which some people believe is a better film than *Frankenstein*. I'm hoping to get some spiritual assistance from James Whale and Mary Shelley.' *Bride* is already in the can and

Rich brat sucker (far left) and The Shunt (left), just two of the things that can happen to you if you mingle with the rich and famous

Yuzna's next film provides yet another new area of cinematic exploration. 'I'm working on a larger picture with George RR Martin [of *Fever Dream* fame]. It's his first motion picture screenplay and it's a futuristic version of *The Invisible Man*.'

This movie goes before the cameras in July and, Yuzna hopes, it, like *Society*, will be a *Wild Street*/Medusa picture. Indeed, Yuzna is pleased with the way Medusa are handling *Society* in Britain and, as a parting shot, comments on the way that successful films appear to be happenin' these days. 'London seems to be where things begin, then they cross over to New York, and then somewhere in LA people pick up on them.'

Maybe there's hope for the British film industry yet.

BRIAN YUZNA: BEYOND RE-ANIMATOR

Brian Yuzna makes his directorial debut with *Society*, but he has been involved in several other groundbreaking horror movies, including...

Re-Animator (1985), which hit the headlines with Jeffrey Coombes as H.P. Lovecraft's manic surgeon, Herbert West, and Brian Yuzna as producer Stuart Gordon directed.

From Beyond (1986) had Jeffrey Coombes back in the starring role yet again, but this time Yuzna took on some of the writing chores.

Honey, I Shrunk The Kids (1988) is the recently released Rick Moranis vehicle from Walt Disney. You cannot fail to miss Yuzna's hand in every part of the production.

Society, after *Re-Animator*, is Yuzna's most controversial film, dealing with social injustice, class politics, perversion and incest.

The Bride Of The Re-Animator (1989) charts the return of Herbert West, this time with women on his mind. Yuzna directs.

Animus is an ongoing project, to be directed by Screaming Mad George.

SERIOUS SEX

Society is an erotic romp through humanity's worst fears, sowing the seeds of paranoia and loneliness amongst audiences, while manipulating them by using erotic visual experiences to get them up and then twisting those experiences into something perverse. After all, what member of an audience is going to own up to enjoying overtly erotic scenes when they are peppered with the ultimate in buggery and symbolic blow jobs. That is not, however, to say that *Society* is about weird

sex. No, it's about social class and uses the one thing that we all have in common, SEX, to get the messages across; and it does so with breathtaking audacity and brilliance.

Director Brian Yuzna and special effects genius Screaming Mad George must be the hottest creative team in Hollywood at the moment. They can see the merits of a good property and turn it into something magnificent. This latest film is bound to follow *Re-Animator* and become a cult

classic. Unlike *Re-Animator*, however, it's likely to make a pile of mainstream box office money. It's the one film this year that I command you to see! John Gilbert

Society opens in London on April 6 and goes on general release soon afterwards.

One step beyond musical chairs: fun and games at a *Society* party



"Rick Fry originally wrote two buttocks connected in the middle, but George suggested legs and a butt"

BUTTHEAD BREAKS THE MOULD

Out-of-this-world special effects were required for *Society*, and who better to create them than Dali disciple and ex punk rocker Screaming Mad George . . . ?

Salvador Dali just had to be the main reference for *Society's* special effects sequences, according to Screaming Mad George, the SFX genius behind the movie's mass orgy.

When George first met Brian Yuzna at Wildstreet Pictures he recalls, 'the script wasn't done in that all the special effects weren't in. There were more occult things in there, with murder'.

The occult thriller emphasis soon changed as the duo discussed melting bodies together and the orgy which, until then, had been talked about in the briefest terms. 'I did a bunch of sketches. I was like the father of the idea. I had a mask that I'd made for Halloween. The mouth was open and the hands were coming out the face and stretching the mouth. Brian saw it and liked it.'

The director and SFX artist appear to be drawn together because of their mutual distrust of the 'blood, blood and more blood' adage that has been with the horror field for so long. 'My interests were never in the splatter area, chopping off hands is not so interesting. Fantastic ideas can go anywhere, but when you see the blood it stops there.'

George's preference for the weird and perversely artistic can be traced back to the Seventies. 'I studied oil painting, and conceptual-oriented realism is important in that. I started a punk band in 1978. I did a show on stage using make-up, guts, stuff like that, for shock value. Then I got more and more into surreal imagery - masks, animation. That's how I got closer to the multimedia art idea.'

'When I saw the movie *Altered States* and John Carpenter's *The Thing*, those two films told me I could turn my fine arts ideas into commercial ideas.'

George enrolled at the School For Visual Arts in New York City and afterwards sent a video portfolio, culled from his punk group act, to make-up man Rick Baker who liked it and referred him to Greg Cannon's shop where Cannon was just gathering speed for production. There he acted as a go-for until 'Steve Johnson called me. He knew about my video tape and

art background and thought of me, as a lot of the design being done was surrealistic. I started working for him on *Fright Night 2*, with the contact lenses and the puppetry for the vampire bat.'

ANIMUS

George went on to his first paid job on *Poltergeist 2*, where he was 'in charge of the vomit creature'. From there it was a short step to *Big Trouble In Little China*, *Predator* and *The Collector*, at which point he went freelance on *Spaceballs* and *A Nightmare On Elm Street 4*, and started to hire his own employees.

Society was a great break for him, and he's generally pleased with the results, but there are some effects which, due to time pressures, he wishes he could have bettered. The weird melding of parents and daughter into one backward walking creature was not,

according to George, up to the standard he hoped for but there was not enough time to re-shoot the sequences.

George must, however, have done something right because Brian Yuzna wants him to direct a new movie, called *Animus*. The production schedule has yet to be thrashed out, but the SFX man is keen to get a grip on the project. 'It's not going to be in the same style as *Society*. It still concerns the psycho-fiction idea but it's dealing more with the subconscious.'

The film will include a lot of weird dream sequences but will for most of the time take place in the real world and not step into the *A Nightmare On Elm Street* mode as George plans to have more hands-on control than most directors. 'I have to be really involved in it. I want to have enough time to be able to do the effects myself as well as the directing.'

Animus sounds like an ambitious project and, perhaps, a worthy successor to *Society*.

Melting moment: a *Society* family combo



"I'm hoping to get some spiritual assistance from James Whale and Mary Shelley"

THEY HAD NOTHING TO LOSE
BUT THEIR SOULS



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FEAR EXCLUSIVE



THE RICE PAPERS

Split personalities have never been so successful. Anne Rice, author of the *Vampire Chronicles* and *Ramesses The Damned*, shares her life with alter-egos who are also busy producing subtly different novels and erotica. FEAR's Stanley Wiater had an audience with the Queen of the Pseudonym to find out all about passion, pornography and idiot editors.





well-received historical works—*Cry To Heaven* and *The Feast Of All Saints*. Rice is not displeased at being best known as the author of elegant, and highly sensual, horror novels. As further evidence of that, last year she published the opener in yet another series entitled *The Mummy* or *Ramesses The Damned*.

Rice is no longer hesitant to admit that she has written mainstream novels, including *Belinda* and *Exit To Eden*, using the pseudonym Anne Rampling. The Rampling books are more erotic than those published under her own name; even so, the degree of contemporary explicitness in these works pales in comparison with her trilogy inspired by the *Sleeping Beauty* legend. Under the pseudonym A N Roquelaurie, Rice has produced these full-blown, S & M pornographic fantasies, skillfully realised in the tradition of *Story Of O* or *Emmanuelle*. According to Rice, the situation was that she enjoyed reading erotica, but could never find any that was well-written. Her solution was to write her own.

Although she is aware of the international cult following that the vampire novels have, Rice states that she has devoted fans for each of her authors' identities—some of whom read all her works, and others who know her only by one name.

Born in New Orleans in 1941, Rice still lives in that city with her husband, the poet Stan Rice. She has just finished another novel of the supernatural, *The Witching Hour*, and intends to work next on another volume of the *Chronicles Of The Vampires*, tentatively entitled *The Body Thief*. However, for this interview, it was mutually agreed that we would concentrate on what it means to Anne Rice to be a working writer, and how others might profit from her literary triumphs—and terrors.

COMMERCIAL EDGE

SW: Let's get right to the heart of the matter. What do you say to those writers aspiring to match your success?

AR: What can I say? The only thing that's ever worked for me was to go where the passion is; to be very intense. Write like mad. Produce. Get the stuff out. I would be lying if I said I wasn't conscious of wanting to write a good story. I'm very conscious of wanting to write an exciting story, a gripping story. And I'm very aware of the fact that that is a commercial element.

Strong story comes first, even before characters?

With me, the storytelling has always come fairly naturally. Even my earliest work has this terrific narrative drive to it. It's always been a 'and then this happened and then that happened' kind of

thing. That gives a work commercial edge. If I was giving advice, I would say don't ignore that. Remember that, 2,000 years ago, Aristotle said about Drama: you have to have plot, character, meaning and spectacle. So remember that spectacle is important. You had that audience gathered into the arena and you had to show them something that was entertaining. There had to be an element of colour, of pageantry, of sensuality. That's how I've always interpreted the term. And in my work, I love to elaborate and amplify the sensuous and dramatic elements. I try to make a very entertaining and spellbinding texture, if I can.

Even Shakespeare would not have written a play unless it was exciting and full of surprises. So don't think that the commercial and intellectual are at odds with one another. They're not. You can write a great novel and have it really suspenseful and have a lot of spectacle to it. Yet it can still have all the philosophy and deep meaning that your soul needs to make your writing worthwhile.

CONFIDENCE TRICK

But there must have been a time in your career when you weren't so confident that you were producing a publishable work. Let alone deciding how to balance the commercial versus the intellectual?

Oh, sure. But I never sent stuff out. The first thing I even considered mailing out was *Interview*, and it was accepted within nine months. It went out because I had a deep, instinctive sense that I had pulled a lot of distinctive elements together for the first time, that the book meant more than even I was aware of, it had a unity that my earlier work hadn't had. And there was a depth, an intensity, that had been lacking in my other work.

We know that your first novel had its origins as a short story, though you've published only novels. Do you recommend that someone try publishing short stories before taking on a novel-length work?

There are no rules. They should do absolutely what they feel like doing. But I would never advise a person to write short stories if they want to write a novel. There's just no point. *Interview With The Vampire* was a short story first, but I just didn't pursue short stories; they don't interest me now. The long form is what interests me.

The main concern is that you should do what you feel comfortable doing. I feel comfortable stretching it out. Going at it from all angles. I don't want to compress it into a short story. I really don't. Almost any idea that really grips me is worth a novel.

It is surprisingly, most novelists would be satisfied with success in one genre, using a single identity. But Anne Rice, whose most recent novel in the *Chronicles Of The Vampires* series

was the immensely popular *Queen Of The Damned*, has found success as three different authors.

The first, of course, is the bestselling writer of such acclaimed horror novels as *Interview With The Vampire* (1979) and *The Vampire Lestat*, a sequel published a decade later. *Interview* was, reportedly, a five-week 'white hot, access-the-subconscious,' midnight to dawn marathon. Following its publication in hardcover, the book had a well-publicised paperback sale of \$700,000, with film rights then sold to Paramount for \$150,000. (Rice is frustrated that none of the vampire novels have gone into production, though all have been optioned.)

Despite the publication of two

SWEPT AWAY

We're curious to know just how the idea for *Queen Of The Damned* originated. It pretty much continues where *The Vampire Lestat* ended, but deals with the 'lives' of other vampire characters rather than just Lestat himself.

I was on a plane and watching the second of the *Star Wars* movies, I believe, and suddenly the whole plot for the *Queen Of The Damned* just came into my mind. It was inspired, I guess, by little things I kept seeing in the movie that I didn't really like all that much. I remember thinking what I wanted to do, as opposed to what I was seeing on the screen. And the whole plot just flashed into my brain. It happens all the time, you read or see something, and suddenly you realise what you want to do. So I decided to break off from working on my witchcraft novel, now that I saw the whole philosophical sweep and philosophical conclusion of *Queen Of The Damned*.

For me, it was the first book in which I really used the computer as the pure poetic tool it is capable of being. Because what the computer enables you to do is range back and forth across your work, and bring it up to your standards very easily. So even my smallest dissatisfactions, things I might have put up with if it had been typewritten, I was quickly able to boot up on the computer and change. So that's what I mean by pure and poetic: the computer really enables you to get exactly what you want. There's really no longer any physical barrier between you and your vision. If you can get it into words, you can really create what you see.

On the typewriter, I don't think that's true. You reach a point where you have this big, ponderous draft,

all of that's swept away by the computer, there's very little between your mind and what you're putting down there. There's really no excuse for not writing the perfect book. You're no longer making the mechanical compromises that move it away from poetry. I see poetry as meaning language at its very finest, and its most intense and most compressed. And you're able to get that essence with a computer.

EROTICA AND BEEF STEW

It's fairly well known that you're in a sense led three lives as a writer: as Anne Rice, Anne Rampling, and A N Roquelaurie. What were the reasons behind your assuming not one, but two pseudonyms when you could have capitalised on the commercial success brought on by your own name?

I did my erotica under the pseudonym because I was asked to do it that way by my regular publisher. They didn't mind my doing it elsewhere, but they strongly suggested I use a pseudonym simply because it was such a radical departure; they did not want it to give a false impression of the work I did as Anne Rice. It was a valid suggestion, because I had at that time enough of a reputation that people would go into the bookstore and pick up anything with my name on it. And if they picked up the erotica, and took it home thinking they were getting an 'Anne Rice novel,' it would be a real shock [laughs]. It's like people buying a can marked 'beef stew,' and finding it to be tabasco sauce! Now, I'm proud of it and I want people to know.

But another reason for the pseudonym in the beginning was privacy. When I first finished the three books, I didn't want to laugh or talk or joke about them with people. And I thought if I started talking about their contents, I might be self-conscious. I thought the real value of pornography was to go all the way with it; not to compromise, not to be squeamish. To be true to the vision. So the pseudonyms gave me some privacy to do that. But I really don't like talking about it too much. I don't like it when people start joking about it to me. They never asked me if I was a vampire, so why should they come up and ask me what I do sexually?

Anne Rampling is really a different voice and personality. I felt that Anne Rice had developed into a European-American writer, and Anne Rampling was used to be an American-American writer. So I used that pseudonym to indicate that it was a different personality. I want to do another Anne Rampling, and having that other voice is very freeing. It's like an actor who plays different kinds of

roles, or a director. Like Ridley Scott, who can make an Alien or Blade Runner, and then turn around and make [something completely different like] *Somerset To Watch* over Mr. Well, my Anne Rampling novels are my *Blade Runner* [laughs].

SENSUAL SUGGESTIONS

One aspect of your work which has practically become a trademark is your deft intertwining of the erotic with the horrific. How do you set about creating the proper mood and tone successfully to evoke this complex set of emotions?

It is a difficult question to answer, because horror and sensuality have always been linked. Good horror writing is almost always sensual because the threat posed in horror fiction is usually a veiled erotic threat. Many people have written about that, perhaps more eloquently than I can. But if you go



back to your earliest horror stories, there's always a tremendous emphasis on mood and atmosphere and the response of the physical body to the menace. Vampire fiction, in particular, is always sensual, so there's no problem really [laughs]. I mean, horror writers are almost always dealing in atmosphere and suggestion. Confusion of the senses, confusion of the mind to overwhelming physical responses—that's part and parcel of the genre.

With me, there's no method. Writing to me is sensuality. It is talking about the assault on the senses, and the effect on the individual. You either do that naturally, or you don't do it. You can't school yourself in doing that. The most you can do as a writer is stand back from your material and say, 'What have I left out? What was I feeling physically? What textual details are missing?' But there can be some wonderful writing with no textual details. You just have to do it whatever way it goes. You can read just a few pages of Stephen King and can see that

"I thought the real value of pornography was to go all the way with it: not to compromise, not to be squeamish"



and even to make minor changes in early chapters would mean making a mess, losing control of pages, having to retype . . . You're doing away with the industrial revolution; you're dealing with a mechanism, with labour . . . and

he's a very sensual writer. It's the way he perceives the world, how a screen door closing sounds, or the flavour of a chocolate bar or a hamburger or whatever – it's all in there. But it's in there because that's what King notices. You may notice something else entirely from your own perspective.

The main thing is to immerse yourself in the material, and reach for the intensity. Again, go where the intensity is, go where the pleasure is, go where the pain is. Go for the passion. Do that honestly, and the rest will fall into place.

ORDINARY PEOPLE

Passion is a word which comes to you so readily. What do you believe makes the pursuit of a writer's life so worthy of that passion – and the heartache? Because it's the greatest creative profession. Anyone can do it any time. Unlike moviemaking, dancing, and classical music, painting – anything at all – writing requires a minimum of equipment, yet allows for a maximum expression of passion and creativity. You can do it at the kitchen table on paper you stole from the office with an old typewriter you got at a junk store. And you can make it from there to the bestseller lists. Somebody does that just about every year. Like Judith Guest, the housewife from Ohio who wrote *Ordinary People* and sent it in over the transom.

But are you saying that if you just keep at it long enough, you're bound to succeed?

The important thing to remember is that it is an artistic realm – even if you're writing the most commercial fiction or non-fiction. That means there's no justice. It doesn't matter how hard you work, it doesn't matter who you know. What ultimately matters is what you put on that page – and whether somebody wants it at the moment. That's when everyone who wants to go into this profession has to believe in themselves totally, be work like a demon, and c: ignore the rejections. When you mail out a manuscript, you are not turning in a paper for a grade. You can mail out a perfectly wonderful and publishable novel and have it rejected ten times. And the reason it's rejected is because you hit ten different people who, for various reasons, don't want to work with this idea. You have to keep going. You must never interpret rejection from New York publishers as a failing grade. They are not failing grades. They mean almost nothing.

Your first novel didn't get accepted immediately. What kept you going at that point?

Some of the rejections I received for *Interview With The Vampire* were ludicrous. Fortunately, I was

confident enough to know that they were ludicrous. Someone else might have been hurt and quit. But I kept writing, and kept mailing out. My attitude was, 'I'm going to become a writer'. I was a writer. So my advice is to remember that you're dealing with people who make decisions on the basis of a whim, and just keep going – until you connect with a person who cares enough about what you've done to publish it. And don't be discouraged if you hit twenty people who aren't that one.



IN THE WRITE?

Often a first-time novelist will receive some encouragement from an editor stating that if this was changed or that was removed, then they might consider publishing it. To make that first sale, would you recommend this venture on the part of the unestablished writer? Never, never, never, as long as you live, revise a manuscript on the basis of a rejection letter. Never! Only revise that manuscript when you get that acceptance letter. Nine out of ten times, somebody who rejects a manuscript doesn't really know why they don't like it, and they're just saying something to you to try and get their feelings down – and it's probably stupid. If you could talk to them for twenty minutes, you would know they didn't read your book carefully, and that they weren't the right audience for it anyway.

It's one of the most heartbreaking things in our profession, the writer who takes a whole manuscript and starts revising it because some idiot editor says, 'I'd like your novel better if everybody in it was an Indian'. Or whatever. So the writer does it, and a year later the editor sends it back saying, 'I don't like it any better than I did before'. Don't ever fall into that trap. Remember, these are people who are buying or rejecting on the most whimsical basis, and it's nothing worth listening to.

What you seem to be saying is to trust your own inner voice – no

matter how relatively inexperienced – over the judgement of editors and agents, no matter how experienced they may be.

The point to remember is that many of them, no matter how hard working they may be, are not very nice people. You can't be hurt by them. Just because somebody has a sign that says 'Editor' and has paid vacations and medical insurance and works for a publishing company, doesn't necessarily mean that that person knows very much or is very smart or is worth listening to. So don't take it seriously if they brush off your manuscript with a couple of lines.

Apparently you've had a few encounters with some less-than-kind editors over the years? I really did get scathing rejections with *Interview*. And I paid not one whit of attention to them. You've got to throw that switch in your head that says, 'I'm going to succeed', and you've got to believe in yourself, and you've got to remember that the arts have always been tough. There's no point in whining about it. Say if you wanted to become an actor. The first people you would have met would have been sitting around in a cafe saying, 'Go home, it's too tough, don't bother'. But it's always been that way in the arts – a bunch of people sitting around telling you that you can't make it. Then the others come out of nowhere and go right to the top.

As I said earlier, there's no justice. The saddest thing for me is the unpublished writers who talk about how hard they've worked. You wouldn't go to Baryshnikov in New York and say, 'Look, I've been standing on my toes since I was five, so I want to be a principal dancer'. He'd just throw you out the front door! That's why, when writers do this thing of, 'Mary should be published; she worked on that novel for ten years', that's sad – because the truth is, you can write it in three weeks and get it published.

What's important is what you've achieved at that moment and if somebody wants it. That's it. The arts have been basically the same for 2,000 years. You just have to do your best, and make others want your work, and you have to keep looking for the people who want it. Above all, keep believing in yourself, because nobody can really tell you you're no good.

"Good horror writing is almost always sensual because the threat posed in horror fiction is usually a veiled erotic threat"

Queen of the Damned was published this February in paperback by Futura.



THE BODY ELECTRIC

Wes Craven, creator of Freddy Krueger, sings the praises of his latest horror film anti-hero, television repair man and mass-murderer Horace Pinker. by FEAR's Mark Westerby.

Illustration: David Fisher photo: christophersage.com/stockphoto



In direct contrast to the seemingly instant deals he did for *A Nightmare on Elm Street* and *The Hills Have Eyes*, Wes Craven's latest supernatural thriller, *Shocker* has been a long time coming. I visit him at his London hotel and, as we sit in the one room that does not appear to be undergoing renovation, Craven describes the difficult birth of his new movie.

"It had a rather abstract beginning," he says. "I had a conversation with the editor, and he said, 'Why don't you do a movie about monster games and people who nobody notices?'"

"I thought that was a great idea about year and a half before *The Hills*. We sat down and sketched out an idea of a killer who, because of some sort of deal with the devil, was able to enter people's bodies and control their electrical nervous system. And the second idea was to make it a psychological thriller."



Unlikely psychic: Jonathan (Peter Berg) with girlfriend Alison (Carl Cooper); Jonathan's nightmare vision (right), the bloodsoaked bathroom

"I realised that television is like the great American dream, and all I had to do was devise a way of going into it as a world"

the typical sort of psychic. So I thought I would take somebody who was completely atypical of a psychic—a football player—and they could have only one kind of psychic dream. So, say a murderer was taking place and somebody who had a very powerful intellect could see that projected upon his own dreams. We'd have a situation where he was the only witness to the murder and perhaps was the only one to see the murderer, the only one who could identify him.

Those were the two ideas, and we developed them into a script called *Dreamstalker*, about a young man who stalked this criminal through his ability to dream about his crimes.

Dreamstalker was originally developed as a series for the Fox television network, the idea being that the criminal would enter a new body each week. 'They liked it very much, but the head of Fox decided it was too violent and too difficult to get through. So, there it sat and at about that time we had the offer to do *The Serpent And The Rainbow*.'

Craven was not unhappy to leave the idea behind because director Jack Sholder produced *The Hidden*, in which aliens inhabit human bodies. 'Three years after the beginning of the idea, we had the opportunity to do a horror film where we would have complete control. So we went back to the idea of *Dreamstalker* and said: 'Well, we'll expand it and make it just a part of his life'.

'We started toying around with the idea of television. I was looking for a parallel world to a dream



world. I ran across a phrase in a scientific analysis of television which said that people watching television have brainwaves that are almost identical to those people have when they are dreaming.

'I realised, of course, that television is like the great American dream, that the true American dream is television and that all I had to do was devise a way of going into it as a world.'

FREEZE FRAME

He decided that his villain, Horace Finkler, should be a television repair man who had made a deal with the devil so that not only could he enter human bodies but he could also travel through the medium of television. 'There was a conscious move on my part, since I've been working both in television and films, to marry the two, and use television technology to make a film.'

Shocker carries a strong message about television, but does not moralise about the mediums. 'There is a certain cautionary message about television, but it's not that it's inherently evil so much as that it is

very, very much with us. We need to acknowledge its presence and keep an eye on it and beyond that we need to enter into it and participate.'

The film makes innovative use of television technology, and the effects appear to have been achieved effortlessly on screen, but Craven still has nightmares about those video stunts. 'We had a new technique which was going to be much faster and cheaper and which used video. In a nutshell the process was that we would take a scene shot on film and transfer it to television, pull the matts off using video technology and then transfer those matts back to cinema and use them for a cinematic scene.'

'It was great in concept, and we even looked at some tests, but it didn't work at all in practice. We ended up incurring an enormous amount of additional expense and tremendous pressure because we were completely re-doing all of our opticals at the last minute.'

Despite the many optical problems, Craven discovered some interesting psychological facts concerning the use of video with film. 'I found that an audience in a

cinema cannot take the same weight, the same impact out of the video image as they can out of a movie image, even if it's in a movie theatre.

There were two ways I had to change [Shocker]. There's a long sequence at the end, the fight in the little girl's bedroom where the concept was to go into the video screen and then play out the rest in a video image, and it proved not to have enough reality. So there's a part where Jonathan steps up to Pinker when Pinker is frozen in mid-air. I do a series of dissolves and come back to cinema for the impact and the reality.

I was also going to have Pinker, when he was coming out of bodies, to almost be transparent and videoised, and, in fact, there is a section of the fight in the little girl's bedroom where he's a video image. But, again, I brought him back to a solid image, although that wasn't my original intention because he never seemed to have the reality when he was videoised. It's a very interesting process. To the human mind, film seems to be accepted as reality, but video is one step removed and doesn't really have that force.

Craven has made controversial horror movies but most of them, including *A Nightmare On Elm Street* and *Shocker* have included very few on screen gross-outs. The worst *Nightmare* sequences occur when Freddy slices his fingers off and Nancy's boyfriend turns into a funnel of blood. Acts, after all, speak louder than words and the director believes that just a few acts of violence have more audience impact than a continuous deluge of blood. 'I try to use it very sparingly, and I think in *Shocker*, excluding the bathroom scene which is after the fact, there's really only one throat-cutting where you see a little bit of blood. There's a scene where he bites the lip and spits out the finger... actually, that was censored.

I find myself very cautious, not wanting to be accused by people that I'm exploiting things merely for the sake of violence. In my first film [*The First House On The Left*], obviously I was very gross: it had everything, including a disembowelling. But I've grown very sensitive to the accusation that I'm just a sultan of slash. So I try to watch myself scrupulously when I make films. I try to attain an impact without doing very extravagant special effects, the gory things.

The interesting thing is that it doesn't matter; the censors still get you, and when you press them and say, 'Look, there's not even anything in it,' they suddenly realise that and then they say, 'Well, it's too intense.' And then they censor you for intensity.' Like many directors of horror films, Craven is vehement about censorship. 'Who censors the censors? They don't like to call themselves censors, they call

themselves the rating board. The way it's constructed, they're really supposed to be us, they're supposed to be made up of people from the industry, because over here we don't have government censors. But, as I pointed out to them, a rose by any name is still a rose and a censor by any name is still a censor. Those are the people you have no control over and they do ultimately control the fate of your film. Not only do they have the right to give a designation to your film, but if you do not have the proper designation in the United States - if you don't have an R - which means that you have an X, or if you have an unrated film, a film you have not submitted to them, you're not allowed to advertise in 98 per cent of newspapers, you're not allowed to advertise on 70 or 80 per cent of the television markets. So, in effect, you have an invisible film. You can't alert the public that it's there, and they're in a perfect position to say: 'We're not doing anything to it. You don't need cuts'.

They never say: 'You must take this out'. All they'll say is, 'Well, this is too intense,' or, 'This section doesn't seem to be an R'. Legally, they're not allowed to say you must cut this shot or that shot. What you do go through this process where they say: 'Well, it still feels like an X to us. We just can't give it an R'. So you go back to your cutting room - usually you're at the end of

Wes Craven on set: refuting the label of sultan of slash

your schedule, at the end of your budget.

In the case of *Shocker* we had already done our mix and we tried to guess what they wanted, and yet you don't want to cut something that you don't have to cut. So you do another cut and you remix and go back to them with that and they say, after sometimes a day, sometimes five days: 'It still doesn't look like an R'. I had one film, *Deadly Friend*, which we submitted thirteen times. It's excruciating and incredibly expensive. So, at a certain point, you cut more than you think you should.'

During the classification process for *Shocker*, Craven became so incensed by the censorship of his 'artist freedom' that he complained to the MPAA. They in turn told him that he did not have to come to them and could release his film uncut. 'Of course, your response is: 'But if I do, I'm not able to advertise and, therefore, I'll have a financial disaster on my hands.' They clap their hands and say: 'A-ha, you're not really interested in art at all, you're interested in the dollar.'

"To the human mind, film seems to be accepted as reality, but video is one step removed and doesn't really have that force"





'They were very successful in creating that. At least in Three and partially in Four it worked, and then with Five it started to fail.'

Horace Pinker has not created as immense an impression as Freddy Krueger, but he has proved popular in US box office terms and Craven is satisfied with his success. The director is, however, annoyed by what he sees as certain emulations of his mass-murdering character by other filmmakers, one of whom appears to have been Sean Cunningham with *The Horror Show*. 'I was very upset to find out about it. We did very diligent research to make sure that our idea had been registered by the Writers' Guild.

'I had long conversations with Sean, and he claimed that his idea had been around a long time. He was not able to produce registered copies of the idea and at a certain point I left it at that. He gave me his word that he would never steal from me, and I believe him.

'There are a lot of other possibilities about what happened. I know that *Dreamstalker* was submitted to a network, and once it's submitted to a network everybody has copies of it and everybody's friends see what Wes Craven is working on at Fox. So any writer that Sean worked with had access to it. I'm sure, because with *Shocker* we went to great lengths to keep it secret. In the middle of what we thought was our success with secrecy, where we were shredding everything, I had a friend call me up and say: 'I love *Shocker*!' I said: 'What do you mean, you love *Shocker*?' He said: 'I just read it. It's great, I couldn't put it down'. I didn't think anyone could get a copy of it, but it was in the Xerox room at Lorimar.

'I was writing a comedy for Lorimar. Lorimar were interested in seeing a writing sample, requested it from their agents and got it. And that's how easy it is in Hollywood.'

Craven's next movie for Alive Pictures is being kept under wraps. 'For obvious reasons I'm being very cautious. The title is *The People Under The Stairs* and it is a film that's fully in the genre. I can say what it's not. It doesn't take place in dreams, it doesn't take place in any alternate world like television, and it is much more of a scary film than humorous. Beyond that, I have to keep whatever secrecy I can.'

"I've grown very sensitive to the accusation that I'm just a sultan of slash"



Shocker goes on general release from April 20.



Horace Pinker enters Jonathan's body through the medium of television (top); the murdered Alison returns from the dead (above)

other hand, is, like Freddy, capable of anything but has a humour more natural than that foisted upon the *Nightmare* child molester by production company New Line. 'I have seen the actual piece of paper where they had summarised the studies they did within New Line Cinema, and the conclusion was that Freddy as a character was too frightening and too cruel and they needed to make him have more humour, to make him of a jokester and to concentrate on special effects.

UNDER WRAPS

Freddy Krueger and Horace Pinker, as envisioned by Craven, are very intense characters, both designed to accomplish certain cinematic tasks. Krueger was originally a satanic with almost no sense of humour. Pinker, on the

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DAVID
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KINGDOM OF THE SOUL



Whether he's a messiah or a maverick, Whitley Strieber believes that an alien culture is seeking to bridge the awareness gap between the real and the illusory. In *Majestic*, his latest book, he argues that world governments may already hold information about meetings which have taken place but, he tells FEAR's John Gilbert, the results may be more wide-reaching than those the authorities fear.

He is one of the most honest men I've met, and one of the most imposing. The man who a few years back flummoxed the US scientific community with his theory of alien visitations marches into the lounge of London's Stafford Hotel. With a firm handshake, he insists we start the interview immediately, despite just having endured a long and late-running flight from Ireland and with the prospect of a grilling on Sky television looming later that evening.

You can't ignore his success, and he's quite willing to postulate reasons why his alien encounter novels do better than scientific texts and investigative books about little silver men who are definitely from outer space. 'The flying saucer people are modern folklorists, but I think the public instinctively senses that there's something wrong with what they're saying.'

Strieber has been attacked by scientists, journalists, religious fundamentalists and even by those who are interested in the flying saucer field, such as UFOlogist Jenny Randle. 'Jenny Randle accused me of plagiarising one of her books - of all the condensing things to do! She was compelled to sign a statement by my solicitors in the UK admitting that I had not in fact plagiarised her book. The reason why so many of the UFO people have been so hostile to me is that they have become aware of the fact that I don't believe their story is the correct story.'

Communism, *Transformation* and the latest hardback, *Majestic*, are part of a trilogy dealing with the spiritual rather than solely physical effects of alien encounters. The idea that our souls, which many religions have always regarded as individual entities, might be part of a group soul, allowing aliens access through our innermost defences, is truly scary. Strieber, the author of

such horror thrillers as *Wolfen* and *The Hunger*, is quick to point out why. 'This has to do with the soul, and of course that's what people are scared about because that's got to do with what is true and most precious about every single one of us. That's also why they are so extremely sensitive to the issues of 'is he lying, is he mad?'

'This is important. We are coming awake to the fact that the soul exists for the first time in history. Previously it has always been a matter of

"Jenny Randle accused me of plagiarising one of her books - of all the condensing things to do!"

speculation, but within fifty years science is certainly going to be able to detect that it exists, because it is an energy and I have had extensive direct experience with it. We are about to discover that the whole issue of human life is the disposition and fate of the soul.

'That's why this has been so popular, and also why there's this heightened level of sensitivity about it because nobody's really sure in what direction to turn. It asks lots of extremely provocative questions that people sense have meaning, but they can't quite tell where to turn - and neither can I.'

DETERMINATION

Majestic, the story of a US government cover-up implemented when what appeared to be a UFO crashed in New Mexico in 1947, reads like a beautifully researched, but fictional, thriller. However, in the afterword Strieber says: 'This novel is based on a factual reality that has been hidden and denied'. But the fictionalisation is not an attempt to gain a wider acceptance from his critics. 'I never try to get around them; I tend to stick my chin out. But what I've been trying to do is think indeterminately.'

'We think very deterministically - A to B to C to

D. We tend to use our minds in the same way that the physical world around us works. But the macroscopic physical world isn't actually a very clear or accurate reflection of the way the universe works. Therefore, by thinking deterministically, we move in an unreal reality, within an illusion. It's not a serious illusion but it works all the time.'

'I wanted to write a book where the line between fiction and fact was intentionally blurred, because it's in that area of blur that the truth emerges. If you pin it down, if you stick a pin in it, you've missed it, it's passed, and that's why the book is like that. It's not to escape from the critics but to try and escape into a better truth, and that's why, for example, at the end of the book, when Will Stone takes the journey that starts in the cave, he goes to the other planet and then ends up fishing. Once he's back fishing you can't really tell whether or not it happened. There's plenty of evidence both that it happened and that it didn't happen in the sense that he's affected by injections during the course of this journey.'

'I have taken such a journey, and I have in my own self questioned whether or not it happened, a journey that had both physical and non-physical evidence.'

CHILD ABUSE

The physical threat of encounter appears to come not from the Visitors but from governmental agencies who, some reporters would have us believe, have pressured persistent investigators into suicide and sometimes used Extreme Prejudice to cover up contacts. Yet Strieber does not believe his own life to be in danger. 'I have followed up many of those stories and a couple of them are true. In the early days, governments were very frightened about this and there was violence, no question about it. I have extensive relationships with the US government, I will be very frank about that. I have had consultations with lots of people, in the airforce especially and elsewhere in the government, and I guarantee you that they don't know as much about what's going on now as the public does.'

'The US government, I believe, is in the process of letting out the fact that there was contact back in the Forties, and that it was buried precisely because of this hysteria. Now they're going to let that out but they've been very hesitant

because they don't understand UFO abduction. If the general public believed and knew that those experiences were real and possible can you imagine the kind of uproar that would lead to?'

Strieber is committed to dissolving the fabrications he believes have been built around alien contact by world governments, and author tours are part of process. 'I would have paid for the publicity for it myself if I had had to. When I committed myself to doing this what I said was: 'You're going to tell about this experience because it's an important experience. The only way it's going to be enriched and made worthwhile is by being brought out on the table.'

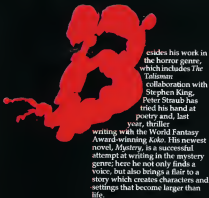
'The writing of it was one thing; people also had to be able to see me, and to see for themselves that I was a normal,

"I wanted to write a book where the line between fiction and fact was intentionally blurred, because it's in that area of blur that the truth emerges"

presentable individual and not some kind of a maniac that came creeping up out of a cellar, and some of my previous books may have made them conclude that.'

The pressure on Strieber from his critics and his continuing experiences is apparent in the way he looks and acts, so it is not surprising that he intends to take a break from what he calls 'The fight' to develop his writing career in other directions. 'I'm writing a new book, a book about childhood and compassion. Society indicates its expectations for its own future by the way it treats its children, and the United States is treating its children now in very much the same way that Frankenstein treated his monster. I'm writing a book about children and it's also a book about compassion.'

'It's a thriller and it is very much in the tradition of my earlier thrillers in every possible way. I'm going back to that, and it's not the last book of this type I'm going to write. I'm going to write a whole series of them because I am a writer of dark fiction. This is what I do, this is what I love, this is my art, and I'm going back to it. I've gone to war, fought my battle, and now I'm coming home. There'll be another battle, by the way, in a few years... and it'll be a very remarkable one.'



esides his work in the horror genre, which includes *The Talisman* collaboration with Stephen King, Peter Straub has tried his hand at poetry and, last year, thriller

writing with the World Fantasy Award-winning *Koko*. His newest novel, *Mystery*, is a successful attempt at writing in the mystery genre; here he not only finds a voice, but also brings a flair to a story which creates characters and settings that become larger than life.

JBW: Most of your novels deal with characters that are young and old. What do you find is the magic of the interaction between ages? **PS:** Gee, I don't know. In fact, until you said that it wasn't a thing I was conscious of. In *Ghost Story*, there is the collaboration between Peter Barnes and the old men of the Chowder Society. In *Shadowland* there certainly is some sort of baplay between the two boys and the old man. In *The Talisman*, Speedy Parker helps our hero on his way, and in *Floating Dragon* there is a young boy who is an essential part of the plot, who must act like an adult with three grown-up friends.

I think part of the appeal of this for me must be that it has to do with the creation of an ideal family. In most of the cases I've described in my work, the families my characters come from are very, very flawed. That is, they're like real families. The needs of Jack Sawyer, Tom Flannagan and Peter Barnes aren't really met. They're met by the older people, who in effect adopted them. In *Floating Dragon*, this for a time becomes overt and Tabby Smithfield moves in with the old man.

In *Mystery*, something very close to that happens. The young man, Tom Passmore, moves into the house of the old man. Now the old man isn't there any more, but he takes over his house. In fact, he takes over his wardrobe. He becomes him. Probably this has to do with finding the right parents. That is, the parents who understand you—unlike your own. It is interesting to me now that I think about it: the first title of *Mystery* was *Family Romance*.

Family Romance is the Freudian fantasy that virtually every human being has in life, that your parents aren't your real parents, that there is another set far nobler, handsomer, more beautiful, more successful... who are your true parents. There is a duke and a duchess somewhere who really parented you and whose some day will come and find you. Most kids have that fantasy and in Tom Passmore's case, in a weird way, it kind of comes true.

COCOON OF CORRUPTION

Most mystery writers try to find a foothold in reality for their stories. When the reader finishes *Mystery* they will be left with a feeling that they've intruded upon someone's private life. With that said, why did you begin the book with the line, "Mill Walk does not exist on any map, let us acknowledge that at the beginning?"

I suppose I wanted to make it really clear that this was a made-up island. When the novel began I wanted it to be almost like a fable land. Because this is a very strange Caribbean island: it's Germanic. It is the only island in the Caribbean that was colonised by Germans. So there are sausages, breweries... People ride around in these carriages instead of cars. The

answered, though Tom knows what the answer is and some readers will. It could simply be put in this way: "What did Jeanine Fieldman refer to when she wrote the note 'I know what you are'?" What was she referring to? It was the note that got her killed. The answer to that question explains Tom's whole life to him.

You've handled some very sensitive topics in an interesting way; you give the reader room to accept things on an individual basis. What were you attempting to do by not exposing all the elements?

It is pretty clear that this is the ultimate colonial society. The original natives are virtually incomprehensible to the people in power. They have their own way of speaking, which is very odd, which

The horror genre has long relinquished its vice-like grip on American author Peter Straub. Novels such as *Ghost Story*, *Shadowland* and *Floating Dragon* have recently given way to *Koko*, a thriller, and his latest hardback, *Mystery*; but he is still interested in chilling readers' bones and, as he tells JB Macabre, this can be achieved beyond genre boundaries.

nobility ride around in nineteenth century vehicles. I think, in part, all this is derived from the pun which is hidden in the island's name. It is called Mill Walk because it refers back to Milwaukee, my birthplace.

In a way, I'm also working out certain feelings about my home town in this Caribbean island. Having said that, the more time I spent on the island, the more real it became. I gradually forgot that it was kind of cloud-cuckoo-land. It became another spot in the sun, except that it had these tremendously corrupt people running the place. I wanted the pleasure of placing it in kind of a cocoon. I wanted the people to be absolutely real, and I wanted the emotional content and context of the story to feel like real life. To me, that was the only point in writing a novel about a detective. I wanted the reader to have the shock that they've encountered the sort of creature you only find in books. I wanted to feel as if they realised that someone like Sherlock Holmes lived across the street.

MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE

The book leaves the reader with a very heavy feeling. It should not be taken on face value. You don't give readers all the answers, and when they come to the last sentence, or last period, it feels like you've alluded to the biggest mystery of all: life.

When the reader comes to the last period, there is another giant question that has not been

I enjoyed inventing. I did not want to write a 2,000-page novel. I was focussed on what was happening to Tom and what Lamont von Hellitz was trying to do to him. Lamont has a hidden agenda all the way through. He has made some terrible mistakes in the past and makes a few more on his way through the book, but he has a plan. Tom stumbles along following this plan, not really knowing what he's doing. That is what I was about. I already took about three or four hundred pages out of the book. I didn't want to put any more into it.

The character development of Tom and Lamont is very interesting. How did you go about creating them?

I'm sure it was the way it always is. I pretty much know them right from the start. For me it happens around the time I know their names.

Right at the start I did not know what Lamont von Hellitz was about. He'd pop up and push himself into a scene and I wasn't sure why. I thought it was interesting. Here was this old guy in these weirdly elaborate clothes. I became more and more fascinated with him. Once I realised that he had this glorious past then he grabbed the reins and took over.

There wasn't any conscious plan to the way he grew, or to Tom. I did know, when I started the book, that I wanted Tom to have a moment of mystical experience—a near-death experience—right at the beginning. I wanted him to be haunted by it all

"The families my characters come from are very, very flawed... they're like real families"

through the book. It is never explained because it can't be explained. Some people have them, others don't. If people have these experiences then they hold a place of authority through their lives. I wanted Tom to possess these central, authoritative kinds of moments and to be frightened of them. It was important for Tom to learn to deal with them as he grew up.

LOVE SPELL

When you've completed a book do you feel you get more satisfaction from the writing, or from your audience?

I draw more total satisfaction from the book than from the audience's response to it. Every time I've written a book I've felt that it was kind of a development and that I

I know many more writers, even some who are not all that good, who really feel they must write, to whom life would be vastly diminished if they didn't.

I'm always very pleased when I realise I've met that attitude in people, because it seems to be the only excuse. Nobody needs another book. We need trees! The only excuse is that you really must do it. If you must, then you come out with books that are worth reading. There are people who bleed over books, and those to whom they come rather easily. I think both kinds tend to feel that compulsion. I think most of the people I know would be very unhappy if they had to do anything else.

Writing does require some sort of sacrifice. In some cases it destroys

the twenty-first century.

I don't feel like a twenty-first century Poe. Poe kept writing poetry all through his life and wrote very significant poems that are still remembered. I wrote poetry with absolute dedication for about ten years and it was virtually all I wrote. Once I started writing prose, the prose gobbled up the poetry. I would love to think that, in ten or twenty years, or even next year or tomorrow, I could start writing poetry and find a real voice in it. Sometimes I can hear that voice and it is nothing like the voice I used to have, but I don't know. I just know that I'm very involved in narrative. I see paragraphs, not

SHADOWS

got somewhere new. Every book has seemed, in some ways, to be a little harder than the one before and my own goals have seemed to change and become more conscious. Every time I finish a book I'm pretty attached to it. After all, it takes a long time.

There are still people around who cherish my novel *Shadowland*. They come up and speak to me about it in a really moving way. I am delighted they do this and I am moved by that. Now it's clear to me that here and there in *Shadowland* I put my feet in the wrong places. There are certain things I should have held to, but I didn't. Part of the charm of the book is that it goes like an arrow towards a point exactly between fantasy and reality. It sticks right there in the crack. In a way, the book says that there is no reality. I might have worked things out slightly differently if I'd been more aware of that. There are certain things, along those lines, that are true for all my books, but at the time I wrote them I was still under their spell.

It seems that with the coming of the computer age we have more people writing than usual. Do you find writing a spiritual experience? I think there are some hacks, but I'm sure the majority still do it for the love of writing. There are also some guys who figured out early on that they could have a somewhat comfortable living without working too hard by cranking out books. I don't have much patience with these guys. To me it seems that they're wiping their feet on something sacred, but

a writer's home life. You seem to be able to hold onto your career and family. What's your secret? Well, I have a really patient wife. That is everything. Also, after three or four years of my writing, I started to make enough money to be able to support us. So a lot of objections began to fall away. That proved I was serious and it proved that she didn't have to do it all. However, that, in some ways, is the least important of the problems. The big problems have to do with the amount of isolation writing and the amount of absorption in it that is required. I think that must be very hard to put up with.

Also, most spouses want to think that they are the most important thing in their spouse's life. People married to very creative types, I think, must know they are not. They're the most important human thing, but one's real life is all internal, it happens when one is alone. This is a tremendous cruelty. In most ways it's like having a handicap. It means you can't live, you can't go out and have the kind of life normal people have. What you have is this life filled with bliss, ecstasy and unheard music, but it is all alone. That can hurt. On the other hand, it is immeasurably gorgeous in some fashion. It's hard for other people to put up with that and it can be deeply annoying.

Reading through your poetry, short stories and novels, it appears that not since Edgar Allan Poe has an author penned such a range of genres. You may well be our Poe of

stanzas. Probably poetry is going to take a long time to catch up with me again.

Peter Straub's *Mystery* is published in hardback by Grafton, price £13.95, and was reviewed in *FEAR* Issue 15.



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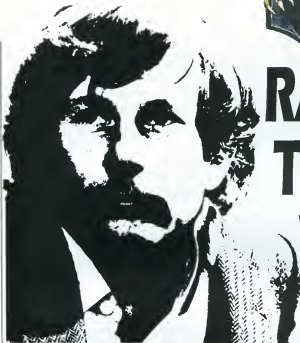
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RAISING THE VERY DEVIL

An entire generation has forgotten the debt modern horror films owe to Roman Polanski, the man who dragged the beast from the depths of collective unconsciousness to the surface where it has festered successfully ever since. Fear's Roger Kean puts the record straight.

*There he hath lain for ages and will lie
battering upon huge scavengers in his sleep,
until the latter fire shall heat the deep,
then once more by men and angels to be seen,
in roaring he shall rise and on the surface die.*
The Kraken Alfred Tennyson

Horror — the film genre — has held honour in the country of the past: in 1967/68 Hammer Horror Films won the Queen's Award To Industry for its record in exporting the stuff of terror to the rest of the world. Twenty-three years later horror is still big business. It's no secret why: film, more than any other medium, is supreme at describing an alternative reality, at bringing into the open the inner turmoil of man's greatest fears. Fear is a fact of the human condition, and it is fear — real or imagined — that horror films aim at. Humankind actually enjoys being frightened by horror films because, by their nature, they are fiction and of

limited length, the horror will stop; and so in fact the horror film is anodyne, safe — indeed, a safety valve for releasing at least the surface pressure of pent-up terror. Whatever the storyline, all horror films, at base, are concerned with the human condition. But there are two major distinctions in the genre to be made: between films which internalise and those which externalise. The vampire films are examples of externalising — a monster from beyond man's realm terrorises the living. Polanski's *Repulsion* is an example of internalising — the only monster here is the human being at its centre. Yet is the former category so very different from the last? In gothic horror stories the monsters are only projections of the collective unconscious, the communal id given shape. So the

distinction really is only one of style, of visual attack, and the best film makes move between them easily enough.

Gothic horror is more than set dressing — dark forests, the crenellated fantasies of Bavarian castles, long corridors of billowing drapes and characters like Count Dracula or Frankenstein's monster — though this is important to atmosphere, films in this category amount to a mythology, adults' fairy tales.

Like all myths they obey strict rules and conventions, and in this case it is a Christian canon which is in force. Vampires, werewolves, zombies and black magic adherents are all driven to oppose but ultimately be destroyed by their link to the Christian ethic. (Frankenstein films fall more into the internalising category). The impediments of Christianity — crosses, blessed water and incantations (preferably in Latin) are man's defenses against these creatures of the night. After all, of what use is God in itself if it isn't opposed by Evil? In Hammer's heyday there was a stronger belief in God, and few probably questioned the natural rightness of waving a cross at Dracula to cower him, but since then film makers have been playing with the traditional devices in a way which suggests that the substance of legend is gently mutating into a more humanist approach. When the Monsignor said to the young atheist in Hammer's 1968 *Dracula Has Risen From the Grave*: 'young man you must take precautions, there are devils available', he

meant a crucifix; and the audience mostly believed, because they were all living in an age before the mass acceptance of condoms. When Jerry Dandridge, the vampire in Tom Holland's marvellous 1985 *Fright Night*, says 'You've got to have faith for that to work on me, Mister Vincent...', the emphasis is on faith, not the symbolic cross Roddy McDowall is shakingly waving at him. In

"Polanski attacked the established Churches and the fatuousness of being comforted by traditional horror film conventions"

other words the emphasis has moved from Christianity to a belief in oneself. This playing with the rules had started even as Hammer were winning their award.

STING IN THE TAIL
Up until the late-Sixties Roman Polanski showed much interest in the structure of the traditional horror film — and in understanding it, began taking it apart. Billed as a comedy (and certainly funny enough), his *Dance of the Vampires* (1967, also called *The Fearless Vampire Killers*) has poison on its tongue. Polanski humours evil by making it familiar: the vampires live as a family, they talk about their problems in a way that later films

have done but few before it; there is a homosexual vampire — and a Jewish one. When the terrified Sharon Tate threatens Alfie Bass's semitic blood sucker with a crucifix he replies, with a wickedly yiddish chuckle, "You got the wrong vampire!" And he has a point, as she soon realises. A Jewish vampire is a greater danger because it is no longer bound by the traditional rules: garlic it dislikes, but crosses it can tolerate schmolerate. The ending, too, destroys any hope for the human race as the good guys race triumphantly away with the comatose Sharon Tate slowly transfiguring into a vampire about to bite her lover's neck. The human race carries with it its own seeds of destruction.

This is a device which has since become common in horror films — the sting in the tail. When Dracula went down, he stayed down — until the next film when some idiot accidentally revived him, but now films must hint at a less than happy ending, and it's probably Polanski's fault. By tampering with the devices designed to ensure that mankind will always win, and having turned them subtly against us, no one is safe in Polanski's vision.



Walls have hands: preparing a nightmare in South Kensington for Catherine Deneuve in *Repulsion*.

Next, in *Rosemary's Baby* (1968), he turned the screw even tighter. Not content with undermining the basis of comfort in the gothic horror movie, he set out to unravel the very knot which held the faith of modern Christians together. By insisting that it's only late, if you believe in the birth of the son of God, that you must also believe in the possibility of the reverse, the birth of Satan's son, Polanski attacked the established Churches and the fatuousness of being comforted by traditional horror film conventions. The film said: believe in Christ, believe in the reality of the Devil — deny the Devil as rubbish and you are saying Christ never existed and the Bible and all Church leaders are talking nonsense. On the other hand, if you didn't take the religious matters seriously, he



The fragile fabric of reality snaps as Rosemary (Mia Farrow) understands the nature of the baby.

times before. Internalised horror, unlike externalised horror, does not deal in mythology, popular or esoteric; there are no monsters on the prowl, no easily defined evil presences, and the films don't set out to entertain in a comforting fashion. They are usually set in everyday realism, not exotic locations like Transylvania. Polanski's *Repulsion* (1965) is set in South Kensington, with a lot of exterior shots to establish the fact. In *Rosemary's Baby* the mention of real actors' names appearing in films, TV ads in the background, Pall Mall cigarettes and the like build up the realism. Hitchcock's *The Birds* (1963) is full of suburban Californian detail against which the mounting horror seems twice as real and twice as frightening. This is the hallmark of the internalised — or psychological — horror film. We identify with it because it is immediately recognisable as our own environment, and after this identification process has happened what follows attacks us much more strongly because we have been made vulnerable in feeling safely at home.

As an example of this *Repulsion* is outstanding. It is the objective

visualisation and the subjective fictionalisation of a young woman's (Catherine Deneuve) descent into insanity. In a sense it explores the old chestnut of who's insane? — them or us? — by hopping from side to side of the character and showing what she's seeing after showing what anyone else ought to have seen. And the everyday locations heighten the

"Sometimes to laugh at terror is the only way to deal with its implications"

basic syntax, so that shock tactics have all the more effect. As the story progresses, so Polanski starts manipulating his audience by relying on their understanding of regular horror conventions — long corridors that seem to have grown since last we visited them, tilted camera angles, bodies in the bath and so on. *Repulsion* is not only a horror film, then, because it has horrific moments and gruesome sights, but because of the message it carries for all of us, that insanity may make its

appearance anywhere, at any time — even in South Kensington.

The internalised horror film attacks our very existence by exploiting the inherent fear man has of his environment — a sort of cosmic 'there but for the grace of God...' which subconsciously recognises that we are animals who have managed to pull ahead of the other animals we share the planet with. Greek myths were heavy on the hubris — an insistent pride — of mankind; just when he knew it was absolutely safe to go back into the sea... There's this constant feeling (deep understanding) that nature is uncaring of humans almost to the point of being inhuman, a collective terror we bottle up inside for film makers to bring to the screen who can show us the pride that comes before a fall. That's why the potato left by the sink in *Repulsion* is such a strong, provided a stunning entertainment, which directly led to films like *The Exorcist* and *The Omen* series. And by setting *Rosemary's Baby* in the blandness of modern metropolitan New York he further made the whole thing seem very believable. In general before that time,



Husband and wife, Roman Polanski and Sharon Tate in *Dance of the Vampires*, were a celebrated media couple until tragedy struck.

mainstream horror (ie with elements of the supernatural) somehow seemed to require a historical setting to avoid being described as nonsense. Polanski made it possible for a string of major features to unleash terror from the midst of everyday normality (recognised by many critics at the time by likening him to Hitchcock).

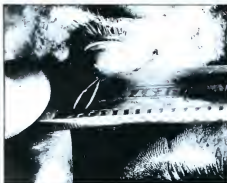
SOUTH KENSINGTON'S NIGHTMARE

Rosemary's Baby was edging more into the realm of internalism, an area Polanski had tapped several metaphors. It grows eyes and puts out shoots; there's nothing intrinsically horrible about it, but in context with the woman's inability any longer to connect it with reality it becomes a distressing sight, a threat and finally a positive danger to her.

The psychological horror film is about man himself and his fears of reality (therefore an introverted struggle), whereas externalised horror, largely the realm of gothic, is about man against artificially conceived evil, what is popularly referred to as the 'unknown' and yet which is really a very well known quantity because it has been created by man. The internalised horror film asks us to look at, and attempt to understand, the tightrope over a bottomless abyss that the human race walks. Sometimes to laugh at terror is the only way to deal with its implications, which is why there is another subset within the genre, black humour.

PAINT IT BLACK

Another way of describing black humour is 'sick humour'. Polanski's *Cul de Sac* (1966) is, among other things, a sick film because its humour is in doubtful taste, cruel and twisted. We are invited to treat its main protagonist (Donald Pleasence) as we would any pompous, self-opinionated twerp – with a boot up the arse. But by the time he deservedly gets it, Polanski has twisted us around his little finger (with our willing connivance as



The gruesome opening shot of Luis Buñuel's 1928 surrealist *Un Chien Andalou*, to which later Polanski was to pay homage in the opening credit sequence for *Repulsion*.

an audience) so that we can share Pleasence's primordial scream of anguish and despair at the film's conclusion – a man alone in a barren, inimical world. We've done all we should while watching the movie: we've laughed, been cruel, been kind, we've cried and we've lived in fear. The border line between tragedy and laughter is very narrow. Black humour makes us laugh one minute and then realise how callous we've been. As the laughter is choked off we understand that the situation is really very sick... and we should have been sorry. Sorry for whom?

Sorry for ourselves, of course. Black humour is a joke the audience can share with the director, and then realise it's aimed at them. We laugh callously at the misfortunes of the absurd characters in *Cul de Sac* and *Extremum Angolia* 1962. Luis Buñuel film, not part of this article other than by mention, but see it if you get a chance), but the film ensures the laugh is at the audience's expense too. In laughing because we understand the situation, no matter how

fantastic, we are laughing at our own inadequacies, our own isolation. Like the child that sits late at night in bed whistling, our laughter is a comforting device in the face of unmentionable (yes – not unknown, unmentionable) terror and loneliness. Read between the lines just once and, like the whistling, the laugh becomes a scream of fear.

In art the Surrealists of the twenties used shock tactics to upset the bourgeoisie from their complacency, and surrealist films like *Un Chien Andalou* (1928) by Louis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí had images which included a dead monkey on a grand piano, a hand erupting with a sore from which pour thousands of ants and – at the short film's start – a woman's eyeball in close up being cut horizontally with a razor. These were visions intended to attack and taunt, not to be shared with a visceral shudder of pleasure-related fear – they were, in fact, sick humour. Such films, re-screened as examples of art cinema, influenced the young Polanski and many other film makers who

emerged in the early Sixties. Polanski paid homage to the start of *Un Chien Andalou* in *Repulsion* by having the titles play over a giant close up of Donatze's eyeball; then the last, Polanski's, shows across the image before it fades. Black humour, even in credits.

AWAKENING THE KRAKEN

Perhaps the best known names in the horror film genre are the more recent; Brian de Palma, Wes Craven, David Cronenberg, Sam Raimi, Clive Barker, Tobe Hooper, John Carpenter and Tom Holland to name a few in no particular order, but among an older generation, with luminaries such as Roger Corman, Karl Dreyer, Fritz Lang, Freddie Francis and Terence Fisher, Roman Polanski is probably the most celebrated (Alfred Hitchcock is an excepted one-man industry), and apart from the 'Master' himself, did more to establish new boundaries for the self-examination of our worst fears, which a later generation of film makers have since been able to exploit.

The pessimism of his human vision can be seen already in one of his earliest films, a short made while he was at film school in Poland called *Two Men and a Wardrobe*. Polanski himself appears, a volunteer to beat up two men who mysteriously walk out of the sea carrying a large wardrobe between them while his

"Like the child that sits late at night in bed whistling, our laughter is a comforting device in the face of unmentionable terror and loneliness"

friends watch. Disillusioned, the two men eventually return to the sea that spawned them, a wonderful mystery which no one in the film is interested in questioning.

It is, then, an irony that the forces of internalised evil coming into conflict with the real world should have played so decisive a part in Polanski's life. He had starred his beautiful wife, Sharon Tate, in *Dance of the Vampires*. Within the year they moved to the States, where shortly afterwards they were visited by a Kraken, benign very real and seemingly insubstantial. Sharon was gruesomely murdered by the lunatics from the mystical Charles Manson gang. Polanski never returned to the realms of the horror film again, though he has not eschewed drama from his work. Perhaps, getting over the tragedy, he may have stoically reflected that to laugh at our fears is one thing, but to laugh them off... well, that is tempting the Devil.

FEAR

THE WORLD OF

MANDARIN IS AMSTERDAMMED!

Heavyweight authors Thomas Harris, Ben Bova, C J Cherryh and James Patrick Kelly combine with a major prize competition to launch Mandarin Books' new science fiction/fantasy list this month.

Enter the competition, details of which can be found on the insert in this issue of **FEAR** and you could be on your way to a major genre convention in Amsterdam.

The Mandarin authors will no doubt give you plenty to read whilst you're there. **Robert Aikman's** brilliant short story collection *The Wine-Dark Sea* has already proved Mandarin's skill at choosing quality editorial and combining it with colourful packaging. This month **Ben Bova's** new novel, *Cyberbooks*, continues this heartening trend as it backs hard tech with social comment as a flatscreen electronic novel threatens a complacent publishing market in the near future.

Meanwhile, though **Thomas Harris** may not have a new hardback out until 1991, for those of you yet to read *The Silence Of The Lambs*, a paperback/film tie-in is released this month. Harris is rapidly becoming one of the most successful masters of the psychological thriller and with the movie about to shoot under the directorship of **Jonathan Demme**, *Silence* is already being described as the new *Psycho*.

Later this year, **C J Cherryh** adds to her already impressive list of novels under the Mandarin imprint and she's joined from the realms of fantasy by **James Patrick Kelly**. We'll have interviews with most of these authors in the coming months. (So, SF fans keep your eyes open! Ed.)

CHIMERA CLINCHES TV DEAL

Chimera, Stephen Gallagher's first horror novel, will go before the cameras in April and will be broadcast on ITV in September.

Set in Cumbria, the story centres around two primate creatures, mother and child. The creatures and other special effects may be created by **Image Animation**, whose work on films such as *Helbraser* and *Nightbreed* brought them international acclaim, although no final decision had been made at press time.



Stephen Gallagher

The Zenith production represents Gallagher's first novel-to-screen project and, according to the author, it will not be the last. All of his books are under option for either film or television.

The most likely to see production this year is *Valley Of Light*, followed by *October*. **New English Library** is to launch a tie-in edition of *Chimera* later this year.

WORLD BOOK BONANZA

The London Book Fair looks like being a bumper occasion for fans of the fantasy, horror and science fiction genres.

Not only will the major corporate publishers such as **Hodder and Stoughton** have their latest wares on show, but a large number of genre related companies, such as **Titan Books**, **Marvel** and **New Era**, will also have a presence.

Held at Olympia between March 26-28, the Fair offers a wide variety of author signing sessions, seminars, conferences and parties. As usual, it is the British book publishing event of the year. Tickets can be obtained for £6.00 on the door and a 300-page catalogue, if required, sums up the entry price to £12.00. Trade visitors are welcome between the hours of 9.30 and 7.30 every day and members of the public between 3.00 and 6.30 on Monday and Tuesday, and between 9.30 and 4.00 on Wednesday.

Read Exhibition Companies have more details. Write to: **Oriel House, 26 The Quadrant, Richmond, Surrey TW9 1DL**

INN SET FOR SUPER-SIGNING

London's Fantasy Inn plays host to its biggest signing session ever when **Virginia Andrews** and **H P Lovecraft** hit town to sign copies of their latest books.

Andrews is an international bestseller, whose books *Dark Flowers In The Attic*, *Dark Angel* and *Heaven* have sold more than 11 million copies. Her new book, *Gates Of Paradise*, draws the saga of her *Casteel* family to a close.

H P Lovecraft is the undisputed master of cosmic horror. His new novel, *The Living Ghost* continues the megalithic battle between dread *C'halhu* and *r'elhal*.

Richard Walter is pleased at the coup. "I don't think you'll ever see another signing like this. It's a once in a lifetime thing."

The signing takes place at the Fantasy Inn at 12.00pm on April 1.

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NIGHTBREED DRAWS NIGH

Clive Barker's *Nightbreed* premieres this month in the States, but its British launch has been put back to September.

This is because management at

Twentieth Century Fox believe it could be a huge success and wish to take time to tailor promotional material and tie-ins

So far one book, *The Nightbreed*

Chronicles, has been published by Titan to coincide with the movie's US launch. It will be followed by *The Making Of Nightbreed* - which includes the script and introduction to the film and a foreword by Barker - and an arcade adventure game from software house Ocean

PAN PARTIES TO EASTCON

Pan Books promises parties, author signings and other promotions to launch its major new fantasy, horror and science fiction imprints.

Each imprint has a new logo - dragon for fantasy, rocket for SF and ghost for horror. Events get under way on April 7 with a party at London's **Cafe Munchen** in conjunction with *Forbidden Planet*, followed by a signing session at *Fantasy Inn* in Charing Cross Road.

Authors already signed for the Pan-galactic promotional tour include Larry

Niven and Steven Barnes, together with their SF novel *The Barsoom Project*, and Chris Claremont, the *X-Men* and *Excalibur* comics book writer whose first novel is a space opera called *First Flight*.

After the weekend, the tour continues to *Forbidden Planet* in Cardiff where another signing will take place on April 9. The Tuesday morning is

given over to a press briefing, but then it's signings all the way for the rest of the week until Saturday when the tour lands at Eastcon, again with its star writers.

The week is geared up to be one of this year's publishing highlights, so Pan urge you to come along. Check your local press for details, this is not an event you should miss.



SNIP! SNIP!

● Preproduction on *Predator 2* has commenced in Los Angeles. The sequel - which does not feature Big Arnie - is to be directed by Stephen Hopkins who helmed *A Nightmare On Elm Street 5*. Stan Winston returns as creature creator, the story location is New York City, and Denny Glover of *Lethal Weapon* fame stars.

● *Two Evil Eyes*, the long-awaited George A Romero/Dario Argento team-up, opened to big box office returns and rave reviews in Italy at the end of January. The film, a two episode anthology based on Edgar Allan Poe stories, will open in the US in the fall. There are no plans as yet for a UK release, but Argento fans should be warned - the film eschews the Italian director's usual stylistic excesses in favour of American commercialism.

● Renny (Elm Street 4) Harlin was paid an incredible \$3 million to direct *Die Hard 2*. *Ford Fairlane*, his surreal black comedy detective story featuring Robert Englund as a leather-clad Nazi, opens this spring. Advance word is mixed.

● HBO have commissioned a further 19 episodes of *Tales From The Crypt*. Richard Donner, Walter Hill and Arnold Schwarzenegger are among the directors lined up to helm a number of episodes.

● Eccentric director Donald Cammell (*White Of The Eye*) starts filming *Alamogordo*, a futuristic action thriller, at Pinewood studios in June. Set construction has already started on this *Blade Runner*-style tale starring Jean Claude Van Damme as a 21st century cab driver. Sean Connery has been approached to play the bounty hunter with whom the Belgian karate expert teams up in an attempt to solve a mystery.

● Arcane Comics' adaptation of Richard Matheson's classic, *I Am Legend* will finally appear in a couple of months.

● KNB FX group have just signed to provide the glue on Rob Reiner's film of Stephen King's *Misery*. The screenplay is by Oscar-winning William Goldman. Casting has not been announced.

● Dark Dreamers: *Conversations With The Masters of Horror*. Stanley Watler's collection of interviews with 26 of the horror field's top talents - including King, Straub, Barker, Charles L Grant, Dennis Etichon and Ann Rice - will appear in a slipcased, limited, deluxe, hardcover edition this spring. Publishers are Underwood Miller.

FEAR US News: Philip Nutman

SUMMER FRIGHTENERS

James Herbert's long-awaited new horror novel, *Creed* appears in hardback from Hodder and Stoughton in July. It's the story of paparazzo photographer James Creed who snaps the desecration of a grave by a strange, ragged figure. The film turns into hot property as a series of near fatal events tempts Creed into handing over the guilt-laden evidence.



James Herbert

Proud at £12.95 the book is bound to be another supereasier for the Brighton-based author.

Stephen King, another bestseller from the Hodder stable, launches *The*



Stephen King

Stand 2, two months before Herbert hits the shelves. A 1,200 word uncensored version of his epic about Armageddon and its aftermath, the book has been on the cards for several years. And, at a massive £16.95, here it is.

Stephen Laws' novel *The Frighteners* at last appears from Souvenir Press



Stephen Laws

at £14.95. The story begins when an ex-convict takes possession of supernatural powers and decides to put the frighteners on those who sent him to jail.

These four books represent some of the more important horror launches in what is likely to be a healthy summer crop.

HARDWARE'S HARDLINE PRODUCER

'I think one of the reasons why Palace Pictures said yes to the project in the first place is that they saw it as an opportunity to make an English *Evil Dead*' says producer Jo Ann Sellar of *Hardware*, the new British horror film.

Both Stephen (Woolley) and Nic (Powell) – Palace supremos) said: 'Go for it,' when I raised the question of gore. It's been a long time since there's been a really gory movie and if you compromise in the beginning there's not much point trying to make a movie like this.'

The nihilistic *Hardware* stars Stacey (Phantasm 2) Travis, Dylan (Hamburger Hill) McDermott, John Lynch and William Hootkins from *Batman* in a tale of love among the ruins of a society sinking under the weight of its radioactive waste. Jill (Travis) and Hard Mo (McDermott), a scavenging soldier of fortune, share a fragile junk-strewn existence that turns into a fight for their lives when they find themselves faced with a death-dealing android. Part Terminator, part Blade Runner, *Hardware* is more than the sum of either. Its screenplay, written by 25-year-old first time director Richard Stanley, reads as if those movies had been rewritten by hardboiled cult novelist Jim Thompson and shot by Dario Argento's head placed on Sam Raimi's body.

Hardware has been made entirely by a group of twentysomethings, nearly all of whom have a rock video background: Stanley, director of photography Steve Clivers, production designer Joseph Bennett and Sellar herself, once a leading light at the Promo Palace. When the crew took over the Roundhouse in London's Camden Town last October it looked like Roger Corman had moved to Britain.

In true last minute low budget form, Sellar came on board the production after the initial financial deal between Palace and US distributor Miramax had been set. 'Steve Woolley needed a producer who could be on set at all times,' she explains. And, with Sellar's reputation for getting the most from a crew under tight schedules and even tighter budgets, the 26 year old former film programmer from the *Scala Cinema Club* seemed the ideal choice.

However, going into preproduction six weeks into schedule was not an easy position in which to find herself on her first feature. 'I have different ideas about how certain sequences should have been handled and a number of deals could have been arranged differently,' she comments. But Sellar entrusts over the script and Richard Stanley's talent: 'I loved it,' she says with a big smile. 'Richard and I view things on the same level movie-wise as he's an old Scala fan, which made it easier. But it's tough when the schedule's getting tighter and I have to insist on simplifying an elaborate death scene due to costs, when my personal



Hardware

preference for tough, gory movies is saying 'let's make it as unrelenting as possible.'

Sellar, a hip, vivacious woman with an eye for talent – her first promo gig was having Sam Raimi direct *Iggy Pop* in the *Cold Metal* video – has come a long way since programming a pop cultural melange of disparate director works at the North London repertory cinema in the early Eighties. Yet it's a logical extension of a career that's brought her into contact with some of the most exciting cinema and music talents of the past decade.

'My decision to get involved with a low budget movie of this nature was because I wanted to work with good promo talent on a feature. Video is a reasonable area to learn your craft but

after a while it's limiting. This is an ideal medium to move on in and Richard's given a lot of people free rein to push their talent. Like Joseph Bennett, who's excelled himself with the production design.'

The only way *Hardware* or any other ultra low budget movie gets made is by cutting costs. 'To do this movie cheaply we had to hire most of the crew at night to nothing.' But this isn't exploitation, Sellar asserts, it's a career investment for all involved. 'It's definitely a big break for people like Steve Clivers and Richard. Most of the crew were only getting a third of what they'd usually be paid, but they're getting great credits in return.'

Most of the movie's £1.5 million budget was eaten up by the set design,



Hardware

a week's location shooting in Morocco, and the heavy effects roster created by Image Animation, with Paul Catlin creating the animatronics for Mark 13, Hardware's robotic antagonist.

Although it is difficult—some would have said impossible, pre-*Helldozer*—to make movies like this in Britain, one factor has always stood the country in good stead: the wealth of talent and craftsmanship that these shores produce. The pound being weak against the dollar may have initially attracted George Lucas to shoot *Star Wars* here in 1976, but British talent has always been a strong rival to the complacency of Hollywood's union-bound technicians. As the saying goes: if they're hungry, they'll work harder. In support

of this, a read of Hardware's screenplay and a sneak preview of some footage indicates that the film will be a strong box office contender against big budget releases like *RoboCop 2*.

Richard Stanley states that he has shot the film in a manner which, should our moral guardians start snipping, will result in there being nothing to run through a projector. 'I think we will have a big battle on our hands, not just here but in America as well,' Selzer concludes. 'But the attitude is we'll fight that when we get to it.'

Hardware is scheduled to turn on its red this summer. Watch out for further news in **FEAR**.
Philip Nutman

JURY SERVICE FOR TERROR TWOSOME

Two of the horror genre's most promising newcomers, Toody author Mark Morris and short story writer Nicholas Royle, have teamed-up to write a screenplay.

Entitled *The Abstainer*, it portrays the perils of jury service and will appear as one of six stories in a series in production at a Leeds-based independent television company.

'The brief we were given was fairly general,' says Morris. 'The producer simply wanted a suspenseful psychologically-based horror story with a minimum of blood and gore.'

Independently, both writers look set for a good year. In April, Mark delivers his second novel, *Stitch* to hardback publishers Plunkett, while October sees the Corgi paperback release of *Toody*.

Morris will also see the publication of at least five short stories in 1990, one of which will appear in *Darklands*, an anthology of new horror by British writers, edited by Nicholas Royle.

'I'm hoping to have delivered *Darklands* to the publisher, Xanadu by the end of March,' says Royle. 'It will contain stories from some exciting young British writers as well as such well-known names as Ramsey Campbell, Lisa Tuttle, Garry Kilworth and others. I'm waiting for another four or five contributions from 'name' writers. If they're up to the standard of stories received so far, *Darklands* looks set to be a major anthology.'

As well as editing *Darklands*, Royle is also at work on his second novel, *Saxophone Dreams*, whilst his first, *Counterparts* looks for a publisher. His assault on the short story market goes on unabated. By the end of 1990 at least twelve new stories will be in print, resulting in a grand total of 35 since his first sale in 1984.

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FILM MARKET UPDATE

Held in LA every spring, the American Film Market is where the distributors buy the films you and I will eventually see on video and the big screen. So here's a brief run-down of a few we may see over the coming year.

The Death Of The Incredible Hulk. Dr Ronald Pratt has nearly found a solution to his disastrous experiment that turns him into The Hulk, but a group of terrorists are after The Hulk formula so that they can create the perfect fighting machine. **Bill Bixby** and **Lou Ferrigno** star.



Ferrigno The Incredible

Basket Case 3. Continuing the saga of *Times Square Freak Twins*, about cult heroes **Duane Bradley** and his hideously deformed brother, **Belial**.

Twilight Of The Cockroaches. From Japan, this animated/live action feature tells an allegorical tale about a colony of cockroaches trying to survive in a world overrun by humans.

The Cilling. This story is about **cryogenics**—the science of freezing the human body to bring it back to life sometime in the future.

Time Of The Beast. Through genetic experiments, a mutant creature is created which causes havoc among the population.

Time Barbarian. The story begins where *Conan The Barbarian* left off. Hunky dudes, busty girls, sword fights and action abound.

The Willies. A hideous creature comes to life from the imagination of a young lad and turns a night of fun into one of terror.

Voodoo Dawn. Two young New Yorkers are out of their depth when they happen upon a voodoo cult while travelling through the Deep South of America. **Tony Todd** stars.

Prime Evil. Set in present-day New York City, following the lives of a centuries-old sect of monks which, through human sacrifices for the Devil, has achieved immortality and is still wreaking havoc today. Stars **William Beckwith** and **Christine Moore**.

Captain America. Based on the Marvel comic book hero. The Captain battles his arch nemesis, the **Red Skull**, to save the good



Time Barbarian



Basket Case 3

old US of A from the clutches of an evil power. **Matt Salinger** stars.

William (Star Trek) Shatner directs *Kingdom Of The Spiders 2*. **Donald Pleasence** and **Jennifer O'Neill** star in a new version of Poe's *The Raven*. Both films from 21st Century. **Robert Davi** and **Bruce Campbell** star in *Maniac Cop 2* directed by **William Lustig**. A young woman is 'seduced by something less than human' in *Meridian* directed by **Charles Band**. **David Western**

CONWATCH

The World Fantasy Convention 1990 takes place between November 2-4 at the Regency Hotel, Schaumburg, Illinois, USA.

This year it ties in with the **H P Lovecraft Centenary Celebration**, marking it with a special display of HPL books, fanzines and letters. The organisers are looking for related material, so if you have something of interest contact the address below.

A tide of brand name writers in the fantasy and horror fields will act as convention guests. Guests of Honour include **F Paul Wilson**, **L Sprague de Camp**, **David Mattingly** and **Susan Allison**. Special guests are **Robert Bloch** and **Julius Schwartz**, while the toastmaster is **Raymond E Feist**.

Events include a **Friday Night Autograph** party, an auction of

rare books and manuscripts, an art show, dealers' room, masquerade and banquet.

Membership charges are \$75 per person, \$25 supporting.

To join, contact: **1990 World Fantasy Convention**, PO Box 423, Oak Forest, IL 60452, USA. For details of the art show write to **Stan and Nancy Bruns**, **World Fantasy Art Show**, 4956 Sherfield Drive, Marietta, GA 30068, USA.

EASTCON, the British National Science Fiction Convention takes place at the Cobden Hotel, Birmingham between April 13-16. Guests of Honour include **Iain Banks**. For more information write to: Unit 28, Metropolitan Works, Enfield Road, London N1 5AZ.

FEAR



Like blood gushing from a severed jugular, the letters to FEAR fiction have been pouring in; whose story you love, whose you hate, whose you love to hate . . . And no two opinions are ever the same, which leads us to suspect that we must be getting the mix about right. If you disagree, then write and tell us why.

Christopher Hester of Baildon in West Yorkshire has submitted a comprehensive survey of FEAR short stories from Issue 1 through to 14, commenting on each one. He reckons the best stories we have published are *Here Comes A Candle* by Pete Atkins, *A Storm In The Wind* by P A Gardner, *Winter On Aubarch 6* by David Riley and *State Of The Art* by Ian Harding. What are your views? Send us your opinions – the good, the bad, the ugly and the unspeakable and, if you want to submit a short story of your own, just cast your evil eye over the small print below.



Thomas Ligotti, whose haunting short story *The Shadow At The Bottom Of The World* heads up the fiction section this month

SUBMITTING SHORT STORIES TO FEAR

If you have a short story which fits FEAR's horror, science-fiction or fantasy brief, then send it to David Weston, Fiction Editor, FEAR, PO Box 93, Ludlow, Shropshire SY8 1QH. Please indicate the wordage of your story at the head of the typescript which should be no more than 5,000 words in length and typed, preferably double spaced. Remember to enclose a day-time telephone number, a good quality photograph of yourself, a fifty-word biography, an SAE for acknowledgement of receipt of your story and a further SAE for the return of your manuscript should it be deemed unsuitable.

Readers whose stories are being considered for publication will receive notification of this in writing. This is not a guarantee that your story will be published and, as we can only feature a handful of new stories per issue, it could be some time before those eventually selected appear in print. In the past few months we have been deluged with submissions, so it could be some considerable time, months even, before you receive a positive or negative decision regarding your story.

Finally, it makes sense to keep a copy of whatever you have written . . . just in case. We are obliged to remind new writers that FEAR does not look kindly upon works of plagiarism.

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THE SHADOW AT THE BOTTOM OF THE WORLD

Thomas
Ligotti



Before there occurred anything of a truly prodigious nature, the season had manifestly erupted with some feverish intent. This, at least, was how it appeared to us, whether we happened to live in town or on one of the nearby farms. (And travelling between town and countryside was Mr Marhle, who had been studying the seasonal signs far longer and in greater depth than we, disclosing prophecies that no one would credit at the time.) On the calendars which hung in so many of our homes, the monthly photograph illustrated the spirit of the numbered days below it: sheaves of cornstalks standing brownish and brittle in a newly harvested field, a narrow house and wide barn in the background, a sky of empty light above, and fiery leafage frolicking about the edges of the scene. But something dark, something abysmal always finds its way into the bland beauty of such pictures, something that usually holds itself in abeyance, some entwining presence that we always know is there. And it was exactly this presence that had gone into crisis, or perhaps had been secretly invoked by small shadowy voices calling out in the midst of our dreams. There came a hither scent into the air, as of sweet wine turning to vinegar, and there was an hysterical brilliance flourished by the trees in town as well as those in the woods beyond, while along the roads between were the intemperate displays of thornapple, sumac, and

towering sunflowers that nodded behind crooked roadside fences. Even the stars of chill nights seemed to grow delirious and take on the tints of an earthly inflammation. Finally, there was a moonlit field where a scarecrow had been left to watch over ground that had long been cleared yet would not turn cold.

Adjacent to the edge of town, the field allowed full view of itself from so many of our windows. It lay spacious beyond tilting fenceposts and under a bright round moon, uncluttered save for the peaked silhouettes of corn shocks and a manlike shape that stood fixed in the nocturnal solitude. The head of the figure was slumped forward, as if a grotesque slumber had overtaken its straw-stuffed body, and the arms were slackly extended in a way that suggested some incredible gesture toward flight. For a moment it seemed to be an insistent wind which was flapping those patched-up overalls and fluttering the worn flannel of those shirt sleeves; and it would seem a forceful wind indeed which caused that stitched-up head to nod in its dreams. But nothing else joined in such movements: the withered leaves of the cornstalks were stiff and unstirring, the trees of the distant woods were in a lull against the clear night. Only one thing appeared to be living where the moonlight spread across that dead field. And there were some who claimed that the scarecrow actually raised its arms and its empty face to the sky, as though declaring itself to the heavens, while others thought that its legs kicked wildly, like those of a man who is hanged, and that they kept on kicking for the longest time before the thing

**"Its legs
kicked
wildly, like
those of a
man who is
hanged"**

collapsed and lay quiet. Many of us, we discovered, had been nudged from our beds that night, called as witnesses to this obscure spectacle. Afterward, the night we had seen, whatever we believed its reason, would not rest within us but snatched at the edges of our sleep until morning.

And during the overcast hours of the following day we could not keep ourselves from visiting the place around which various rumors had hastily arisen. As pilgrims we wandered into that field, scrutinizing the debris of its harvest for augural signs, circling that scarecrow as if it were a great idol in shabby disguise, a sacred avatar out of season. But everything upon that land seemed unwilling to support our hunger for revelation, and our congregation was lost in fidgeting bemusement. (With the exception, of course, of Mr Marble, whose eyes, we recall, were gleaming with illuminations he could not offer us in any words we would understand.) The sky had hidden itself behind a leaden vault of clouds, depriving us of the crucial element of pure sunlight which we needed to burn off fully the misty dreams of the past night. And a vine-twisted stone wall along the property line of the farm was the same shade as the sky, while the dormant vines themselves were as colorless as the stone they enmeshed like a strange network of dead veins. But this calculated grayness was merely an aspect of the scene, for the colors of the abundant woods along the margins of the landscape were undulled, as if those radiant leaves possessed some inner source of illumination or stood in contrast to some deeper shadow which they served to mask.

Such conditions no doubt impeded our efforts to come to terms with our fears about that particular field. Above all these manifestations, however, was the fact that the earth of those harvested acres, especially in the area surrounding the scarecrow, was unnaturally warm for the season. It seemed, in fact, that a late harvest was due. And some insisted that the odd droning noises that filled the air could not be blamed on the legions of local cicadas but indeed rose up from under the ground.

By the time of twilight, only a few stragglers remained in the field, among them the old farmer who owned this suddenly notorious acreage. We knew that he shared the same impulse as the rest of us when he stepped up to his scarecrow and began to tear the impostor to pieces. Others joined in the vandalism, pulling out handfuls of straw and stripping away the clothes until they

had exposed what lay beneath them — the strange and unexpected sight.

For the skeleton of the thing should have been merely two crosswise planks. We verified this common fact with its maker, and he swore that no other materials had been used. Yet the shape that stood before us was of a wholly different nature. It was something black and twisted into the form of a man, something that seemed to have come up from the earth and grown over the wooden planks like a dark fungus, consuming the structure. There were now black legs that hung as if charred and withered; there was a head that sagged like a sack of ashes upon a meager body of blackness; and there were thin arms stretched out like knobby branches from a lightning-scorched tree. All of this was supported by a thick dark stalk which rose out of the earth and reached into the effigy like a hand into a puppet.

And even as that dull day was dimming into night, our vision was distracted by the profounder darkness of the thing which dangled so blackly in the dusk. Its composition appeared to be of the blackest earth, of earth that had gone stagnant somewhere in its depths, where a rich loam had festered into a bog of shadows. Soon we realised that each of us had gone silent, entranced by a deep blackness which seemed to absorb our sight but which exposed nothing to scrutiny except an abyss in the outline of a man. Even when we ventured to lay our hands on that mass of darkness, we only found greater mysteries in its very materiality. For there was almost no tangible sensation to it, not even the smoothness of glass, nor did it seem to possess as much solidity as the thinnest liquid. Closer to its sensory impact would be the feel of flames, but flames of only the slightest warmth, black flames that have curled together and taken on the rough texture of spoiled fruit. And there was a vague sense of circulation, as though a kind of serpentine life swirled gently within. But no one could stand to keep his hold upon it for long before stepping suddenly away.

'Whatever the damn thing is, it's not going to be rooted to my land,' said the old farmer. Then he walked off toward the barn. And like the rest of us he was trying to rub something from the hand that had touched the shriveled scarecrow, something that could not be seen.

He returned to us with an armory of axes, shovels, and other implements for uprooting the thing that had grown upon his land. It would

"All of this was supported by a thick dark stalk which rose out of the earth and reached into the effigy like a hand into a puppet"

seem to have been a simple task: the ground was unusually soft all around the base of that black growth and its tenuous substance could hardly resist the wide blade of the farmer's axe. But when the old man swung and tried to split the thing like a piece of firewood, the blade would not cleave. The axe entered and was closed upon, as if sunk within a viscous mire. The farmer pulled at the handle and managed to dislodge the axe, but he immediately let it fall from his hands. 'It was pulling back on me,' he said in a low voice. 'And you heard that sound.' Indeed, the sound which had haunted the area all that day — like innumerable insects laughing — did seem to rise in pitch and intensity when the thing was struck.

Without a word, we began digging up the earth where that thick black stalk was buried. We dug fairly deep before the approaching darkness forced us to abandon our efforts. Yet no matter how far down we burrowed, it was not far enough to reach the bottom of that sprouting blackness. Furthermore, our attempts became hindered by a strange reluctance and tentativeness, as in the instance of someone who is profoundly ambivalent about cutting away a diseased part of his own body in order to keep the disease from spreading.

It was nearly pitch dark when we finally walked away from that field, for the clouds of that day had lingered to hide the moon. In the blackness our voices whispered various strategies, so that we might yet accomplish what we had thereto failed in doing. Yes, we whispered, although none of us would have said why he did so.



The great shadow of a moonless night encompassed the landscape, preserving us from seeing the old farmer's field and what was tenanted there. And yet so many of the houses in town were in vigil throughout those dark hours. Soft lights shone through curtained windows along the length of each street, where our trim wooden homes seemed as small as dollhouses beneath the dark, rustling depths of the season. Above the gathered roofs hovered the glass globes of streetlamps, like little moons set inside the dense leaves of elms and oaks and maples. Even in the night, the light shining through those leaves betrayed the festival of colors seething within them, blazing auras which had not faded with the passing days, a plague of colors that had already begun to infect our dreams. This prodigy

had by then become connected in our minds with that field just outside of town and the strange growth which there had taken root.

Thus, a sense of urgency led us back to that place, where we found the old farmer waiting for us as the frigid auras of dawn appeared above the distant wood. Our eyes scanned the frost-powdered earth and studied every space among shadows and corn shocks spread out over the land, searching for what was no longer present in the scene. 'It's gone back,' the farmer revealed to us. 'Gone into the earth like something hiding in its shell. Don't walk there,' he warned, pointing to the mouth of a wide pit.

We gathered about the edge of this opening in the ground, probing its depths with shovels and pitchforks. Even full daybreak did not show us the bottom of that dark well. Our speculations were brief and useless. Some of us picked up the shovels lying nearby, as if to begin the long duty of filling in the great aperture. 'No use in that,' said the farmer. He then found a large stone and dropped it straight down the shaft. We waited and waited; we put our heads close to the hole and listened. But all we seemed to hear was a remote, droning echo, as of the countless voices of insects chattering unseen. Finally, we covered the hazardous pit with some boards and buried the enclosure under a mound of soft dirt. 'Maybe there'll be some change in the spring,' someone said. But the old farmer only chuckled. 'You mean when the ground warms up? Why do you think those leaves aren't falling the way they should?'



It was not long after this troubling disappearance that our dreams, which formerly had been the merest shadows and glimpses, swelled into full phase. Yet they must not have been dreams entirely, but also excavations into the season which had inspired them. In sleep we were consumed by the feverish life of the earth, cast among a ripe, fairly rotting world of strange growth and transformation. We took a place within a darkly flourishing landscape where even the air was ripened into ruddy hues and everything were the wrinkled grimace of imminent decay, the mottled complexion of old flesh. The face of the land itself was knotted with so many other faces, ones that were corrupted by vile impulses. Grotesque expressions were molding themselves into the darkish grooves of ancient bark and the whorl of withered leaf; pulpy, mis-

"Whatever the damn thing is, it's not going to be rooted to my land," said the old farmer"

shapen features peered out of damp furrows; and the crisp skin of stalks and dead seeds split into a multitude of crooked smiles. All was a freshish mask painted with russet, rashy colors — colors that bled with a virulent intensity, so rich and vibrant that things trembled with their own ripeness and festered into spectrums of hypnotic depth and intricacy. But despite this gross palpability, there remained something spectral at the heart of these dreams. It moved in shadow, a presence that was in the world of solid forms but not of it. Nor did it belong to any other world that could be named, unless it was to that realm which is suggested to us by an autumn night when fields lay ragged in moonlight and some wild spirit has entered into things, a great aberration sprouting forth from a chasm of moist and fertile shadows, a hollow-eyed howling malignity rising to present itself to the cold emptiness of space and the pale gaze of the moon.

And it was to that moon we were forced to look for comfort when we awoke trembling in the night, overcome by the sense that another life was taking root within us, seeking its ultimate incarnation in the bodies we always dreamed were our own and inviting us into the depths of an extraordinary harvest.



Certainly there was some relief when we began to discover, after many insecure hints and delvings, that the dreams were not a sickness restricted to solitary individuals or families but in fact were epidemic throughout the community. No longer were we required to disguise our uneasiness as we met on the streets under the luxuriant shadows of trees that would not cast off their gaudy foliage, the mocking plumage of a strange season. We had become a race of eccentrics and openly declared an array of curious whims and suspicions, at least while daylight allowed this audacity.

Honored among us was that one old fellow, well known for his oddities, who had anticipated our troubles weeks beforehand. As he wandered about town, wheeling the blade-sharpening grindstone by which he earned his living, Mr Marble had spoken of what he could 'read in the leaves', as if those fluttering scraps of lush color were the pages of a secret book in which he perused gold and crimson hieroglyphs. 'Just look at them,' he urged passersby, 'bleeding their colors like that. They should be bled dry, but now

they're... making pictures. Something inside trying to show itself. They're as dead as rage now, look at them all limp and flapping. But something's still in there. Those pictures, do you see them?'

Yes, we saw them, though somewhat belatedly. And they were not seen only in the chromatic designs of those deathless leaves. They could show themselves anywhere, if always briefly. Upon a cellar wall there might appear an ill-formed visage among the damp and fractured stones, a hideous impersonation of a face infiltrating the dark corners of our homes. Other faces, leprous masks, would arise within the grain of paneled walls or wooden floors, spying for a moment before sinking back into the knotty shadows, withdrawing below the surface. And there were so many nameless patterns that might spread themselves across the boards of an old fence or the side of a shed, engravings all tangled and wizened like a subterranean craze of roots and tendrils, an underworld riot of branching convolutions, gnarled ornamentations. Yet these designs were not unfamiliar to us... for in them we recognised the same outlines of autumnal decay that illuminated our dreams.

Like the old visionary who sharpened knives and axes and curving scythes, we too could now read the great book of countless colored leaves. But still he remained far in advance of what was happening deep within us all. For it was he who manifested certain idiosyncrasies of manner that would have later appeared in so many others, whether they lived in town or on one of the nearby farms. Of course, he had always set himself apart from us by his waywardness of speech, his willingness to utter pronouncements of dire or delightful curiosity. To a child he might say: 'The sight of the night can fly like a kite', while someone older would be told: 'Doesn't have arms but it knows how to use them, and doesn't have a face, but it knows where to find one.'

Nevertheless, he piled his trade with every efficiency, peddling the mechanism that turned the grindstone, expertly honing each blade and taking his pay like any man of business. Then, we noticed, he seemed to become distracted in his work. In a dull trance he touched metal implements to his spinning wheel of stone, careless of the sparks that flew into his face. Yet there was also a wild luminousness in his eyes, as of a diamond-bright fever burning within him. Eventually we found ourselves avoiding his company, though we now attributed this merely to

"We gathered about the edge of this opening in the ground, probing its depths with shovels and pitchforks"

some upsurge in his perennial strangeness rather than to any recent change in his behaviour. It was not until he no longer appeared on the streets of town, or anywhere else, that we admitted our fears about him.

And these fears necessarily became linked to the other disruptions of that season, those extravagant omens which were gaining force all around us. The disappearance of Mr Marble coincided with a new phenomenon, one that finally became apparent in the twilight of a certain day when all of the clustering and tenacious foliage seemed to exude a vague phosphorescence. By nightfall this prodigy was beyond skepticism. The multicolored leaves were softly glowing against the black sky, an untimely nocturnal rainbow which scattered its spectral tints everywhere and dyed the night with a harvest of hues: peach gold and pumpkin orange, honey yellow and winy amber, apple red and plum violet. Luminous within their leafy shapes, the colors cast themselves across the darkness and were splattered upon our streets and our fields and our faces. Everything was resplendent with the pyrotechnics of a new autumn.

That night we kept to our houses and watched at our windows. It was no marvel, then, that so many of us saw the one who wandered that iridescent eve, who joined in its outbursts and celebrations. Possessed by the ecstasies of a dark festival, he moved in a trance, bearing in his hand that great ceremonial knife whose keen edge flashed a thousand glittering dreams. He was seen standing alone beneath trees whose colors shined upon him, staining his face and his tattered clothes. He was seen standing alone in the yards of our houses, a rigid scarecrow concocted from a patchwork of colors and shadows. He was seen stalking slow and rhythmically beside high wooden fences that were now painted with a quivering colored glow. Finally, he was seen at a certain intersection of streets at the center of town; but now, as we saw, he was no longer alone.

Confronting him in the open night were two figures whom none of us knew: a young woman and, held tightly by her side, a small boy. We were not unaccustomed to seeing strangers on the streets of town, or even stopping by one of the surrounding farms — people who were passing through, some momentarily lost. And it was not too late in the evening for some travellers to appear, not really late at all. But they should not have been there, those two. Not on that night. Now they stood transfixed before a creature of

whom they could have no conception, a thing that squeezed the knife in its hand the way the woman was now squeezing the small boy. We might have done something but did not; we might have made some effort to help them. But the truth is that we wanted what was going to happen to them to happen — we wanted to see them silenced. Such was our shameful desire. Only then would we be sure that they could not tell what they knew, what they must certainly have learned. Not about the trees that glowed so unnaturally in the night; not about the chattering noises that now began rising to a pitch of vicious laughter; not about that farmer's field where a mound covered a bottomless hole that reached deep into the earth. But about us.

And we lost all hope when we saw the quaking hand that could not raise the knife, the tortured face that could only stare while those two terrible victims — the rightful sacrifice! — ran off to safety, never to be seen by us again. After that we turned back to our houses, which now reeked of moldering shadows, and succumbed to a dreamless sleep.



Yet at daybreak it became evident that something had indeed happened during the night. The air was silent, everywhere the earth was cold. And the trees now stood bare of leaves, all of which lay dark and withered upon the ground, as if their strangely deferred dying had finally overtaken them in a sudden rage of mortification. Nor was it long before Mr Marble was discovered by an old farmer.

The corpse reposed in a field, stretched face-down across a mound of dirt and alongside the remains of a dismantled scarecrow. When we turned over the body we saw that its staring eyes were as dull as that ashen autumn morning. We also saw that its left arm had been slashed by the knife held in its right hand. Blood had flowed over the earth and blackened the flesh of the suicide.

But those of us who handled that limp, nearly weightless body, dipping our fingers into the dark wound, found nothing at all that had the feeling of blood. We knew very well, of course, what that shadowy blackness did feel like; we knew what had found its way into the man before us, dragging him down into its savage world. His dreams had always reached much deeper than ours. So we hurried him deep in a bottomless grave.

THOMAS LIGOTTI was born in Detroit in 1953. His writing is comprised mainly of short stories, and in 1983 he won the Best Horror Story Award from the Small Press Writers' and Artists' Organisation for his story, *Drink To Me Only With Labyrinths Eyes*. In 1989 *Songs Of A Dead Dreamer*, an anthology of his work, was published in the UK by Robinson. Ligotti lives in Michigan and is currently working on a novel; his interests include horse-racing and the movies.

"Yet there was also a wild luminousness in his eyes, as of a diamond-bright fever burning within him"



THIS MORTAL COIL

By Mark Gorton

Like a smile behind a mourning veil the sun was rising into a grey sky. Gordon West BSc, a maths graduate pursuing a further degree, stood at the single leaded window of Durham University's department of Applied Stochastics. Earmuffs clamped firmly to his head, chin cupped in bony hands, he gazed at the outside world.

On the green, muscular young men were enjoying some early cricket practice. The tall chap with the bat moved gently onto the front foot and played an exquisite shot. The ball unzipped the dew-laden grass much too fast for so little effort, and the batsman laughed, delighted, relishing the thrill of perfect timing.

Gordon sighed. He was not a sporting type. He had never known this sort of unthinking pleasure, the sweet shudder transmitted from bat to forearms and, finally, to every cell in the body. No, he was dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge. His first language was the universal tongue

of pure mathematics, and his life was devoted to the explanation of the physical world. To Gordon cricket was not sport; it was ballistics, air-resistance and The Laws of Motion.

He blinked and refocused on his reflection in a small pane of cracked glass. Closing his eyes he winced, remembering just what the hell he was doing here. Was this a fit place for a mind as incisive as his? True, the grant from the C P Snow Two Cultures Foundation had been a lifeline out of the hole, but for pity's sake, this ridiculous experiment was a complete waste of time.

He turned wearily from the window. Oh dear, it was so depressing. In a crazy cat's cradle of piano wire driven by cogs, cams and pulleys, three chimpanzees were taking breakfast. Each was battering the keyboard of a word processor, and on each VDU an incessant jumble of random letters, numbers and punctuation marks bathed the strange proceedings in hideous green light. As the chimps typed, morsels of fruit danced towards their drooling lips; grapes, bananas and pineapple rings (once in syrup) were just some of the delicacies suspended from the latticework of twanging wires.

Gordon had been working in the Department of Applied Stochastics for three months now. To date, as he had expected, the experiment had drawn a blank of galactic dimensions.

Still, it paid his wages and funded his continuing studies. He straightened his back, squared his shoulders, and took a spanner from his jeans pocket. He tightened a few nuts, then squirted a couple of cogs with a small oil can.

It was now 9am, time for the early stats check. Gordon logged into the computer system. Reflected in his monitor screen he resembled some sort of deep-sea fish rarely seen above a thousand fathoms. He tapped keys.

SUBJECT 1: LETTER FREQUENCIES 0.01% OF STANDARD ENGLISH USAGE

SUBJECT 2: LETTER FREQUENCIES UNRECOGNISABLE

SUBJECT 3: FORGET IT...

Gordon buried his face in his hands and rubbed his tired eyes. 'Oh God,' he said, with feeling. Today he was due to welcome SUBJECT 4, another blasted chimp. He didn't know whether to laugh or cry. So instead he said 'Oh God' again.

Eight hours later Gordon was dozing in his chair, suspended between sleep and waking, when he was immersed in a peculiar dream, helter-skelter through a Klein bottle. From behind a flickering eyelid he saw a light flashing above the room's heavy wooden door; semiconscious, he did nothing. All around him the chimpanzees were typing with renewed frenzy: it was tea-time.

Gordon watched the light. Three flashes per second, and yet somehow its blinking seemed to take on an urgency. Then he realised that someone was outside, seeking entry. He raised his aching body from the chair and ducked through the wires and their dancing menu. At the door he stretched, then opened up.

Outside he saw a small man in what was left of a pair of overalls locked in a furious struggle with a young chimp. The man was emitting silent shouts and screams. The chimp's mouth was a purposeful grimace, and good God, he was lithe and quick!

Suddenly the man was thrown to the ground and pinned down. The silent shouts became more frequent. The man's eyes stared imploring. Gordon watched, as if floating beyond the action in a sort of out-of-body experience. Then a curtain opened in his mind and he removed the earmuffs.

'For God's sake help me!' begged the man.

Gordon did nothing. A chimp, even a young chimp, could deliver a mortal blow. He decided to assess the situation, considering all variables.

'He's trying to kill me! Don't just stand there!'

The monkey shifted, increasing its pressure on the man's windpipe.

'Don't make any sudden movements,' said Gordon.

'Euuuurgh!' said the man, as the life was squeezed from his vocal chords.

At last, Gordon threw open the door and stepped into the yard. He got down on all fours and presented his backside to the chimp, a simian white flag of surrender.

'You're a great help... euurrrgh!' said the man.

But suddenly the chimp's grip weakened. At first Gordon congratulated himself. Then he noted that the breakthrough was nothing to do with him at all: the chimp had caught sight of the goings-on inside the Department of Applied Stochastics. These alone had distracted him from murder.

The chimp released his victim, stood, and walked slowly to the door, a smile broadening on his face. Gordon watched, bemused. The ape's behaviour was strange, to say the least.

The man got to his feet and tapped Gordon on the shoulder.

'Look what he's done to my overalls! They were new on this morning!'

'Aggression due to environment dislocation. Typical simian response, I think...'

'Bugger that. And bugger him. And bugger you for that matter. What're you going to do about these, eh?'

'You'll be reimbursed, File a claim to the Department of...'

Gordon looked back over his shoulder. The new chimp was circling the vacant word processor, his face illuminated by some inner brilliance.

'Department of what?' said the man.

'The Department of Applied...'

Now the chimp was climbing up onto the empty chair. He reached behind the VDU and turned on the power.

'The Department of Applied Buggers!' the man bellowed.

Gordon stepped into the room, he turned briefly to face the man. 'It's written on the door. Make a claim for any damages. Goodbye.'

Immersed once again in the aural inferno, Gordon replaced his earmuffs. He clasped his hands together, stilling an involuntary tremor. There was something about this new chimp, something peculiar. He was typing, yes, but the food held no interest for him. What was more, the chimp was typing carefully — or as carefully as his evident excitement permitted — with two fingers, and pausing as if searching for words. And then, amid the hazy shadows, Gordon saw a hand of vivid green flashing on his own VDU. He ducked into the cat's cradle and checked.

"It's been claimed in Durham today that a dead man has been reborn as a chimpanzee"

SUBJECT 4: LETTER FREQUENCIES
THOSE OF MODERN ENGLISH USAGE.

Gordon trembled; he had not expected the experiment to work, he knew it could never work! What was happening now was extraordinary, preternatural perhaps, far removed from the known world and the light science could throw upon it. The hair on the back of his neck bristled, and in a brief but clear vision he saw himself hating on a green, sweet-smelling pitch. A fast bowler ran up, delivered, and Gordon drove straight and high, and the ball rose — ignoring the hallistic parabola which marks the rise and fall of all things — into clouds tumbling like slow-motion light where the heavenly host chorused.

He pulled himself together and, circling the word processor, he crept towards the new chimp. He swallowed and craned his neck in the direction of the rapidly filling screen. He saw words, English words, words he could read.

DEAR MANKIND, I HAVE BEEN GIVEN THE REMARKABLE OPPORTUNITY TO REPORT FROM BEYOND THE GRAVE. THE OPPORTUNITY TO TELL YOU ALL THAT THERE IS NO NEED TO FEAR DEATH...

There was more, much more, but Gordon could digest only the opening sentence. And at this point the monkey turned and looked at him, joy written across his hairy face. Gordon returned a smile of sorts, a tiny muscle twitching thirteen to the dozen beneath his left eye.

He pulled up a chair.

WHO ARE YOU? he typed.

MY NAME IS — OR WAS — RONALD BRISTOW, the chimp replied.

I'M NOT WITH YOU.

NOT SO LONG AGO I WAS AN INSURANCE SALESMAN IN LIVERPOOL. I DIED AND WAS BORN AGAIN AS A CHIMPANZEE.

HOW?

MY DEATH WAS STRAIGHTFORWARD. I WAS FLATTENED BY A BUS. AS FOR MY CONFUSED REBIRTH I'M NOT SO SURE. BUT I HAVE A THEORY.

WHAT THEORY?

DOCTORS DELAYED MY REINCARNATION. I WAS SUSPENDED BETWEEN TWO LIVES, A FREAK. IN THIS WAY I HAVE BEEN ENTRUSTED WITH AN IMPORTANT MISSION. I AM A MESSENGER FROM THE UNKNOWN WHO MUST TELL THE WORLD THAT DEATH IS AN ILLUSION, THAT THE HUMAN LIFE WE FRET ABOUT SO MUCH IS

BUT A SINGLE REVOLUTION OF AN EVER-SPINNING WHEEL. I NEED SOME MEDIA COVERAGE. WILL YOU HELP?

YES, typed Gordon, BUT FIRST I MUST EVALUATE YOUR PRESENCE. I'M A SCIENTIST, I WOULD LIKE TO RUN SOME TESTS.

FORGET THE TESTS! YOU AND YOUR SCIENCE ARE HISTORY NOW. THE FUTURE IS ANOTHER WORLD. A NEW AND BETTER WORLD. TAKEN FROM THE SHADOW AND INTO THE LIGHT. WILL YOU HELP OR NOT?

YES.

BY THE WAY, WHAT'S THIS MADHOUSE ALL ABOUT?

AN EXPERIMENT IN RANDOM CREATIVITY.

DO YOU RUN THE SHOW?

YES.

YOU POOR DEVIL.

I KNOW.

COME ON.

A pause; Gordon mused.

OK.

Gordon took his fingers from the keyboard and extended his hand towards the chimp, who smiled and offered his own hand in return. Man and monkey touched, then shook, sealing their partnership. Gordon shut down the computer system and opened the door to the chimps' recreation room. And then, hand in hand with the monkey who was once Ronald Bristow, he locked the door to the Department of Applied Stochastics and walked out onto the green.

The library clock began to chime six.

A thought, pure and crystalline, took shape in Gordon's mind.

'We'll have to hurry,' he said, turning to Ronald.

'Hoo-hoo-eeek!'

'Come on then!'

◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆

Big Ben began to strike as the *News at Ten* titles rolled. In his tiny room Gordon stood on the bed holding the serial of his portable out of the window.

'The signal bounces off the cathedral,' he told Ronald, who was sitting nervous and cross-legged on a tattered armchair, 'and the picture ghosts unless I find this optimum position.'

Ronald's face appeared in close-up on the screen.

'Reincarnation or monkey business?' asked the

"You've got brains... if you want to keep them inside your heads, we don't exist. Right?"

voiceover. 'Was this chimp a human being in a former life? Or is a chimp in Durham making chumps of us all? A report later.'

As he and Ronald sat through the national and international top news stories, Gordon's arm began to ache. At last, after the commercial break, the silver-haired anchorman turned to the camera with an amused glint in his good eye and read the following link.

'It's been claimed in Durham today that a dead man has been reborn as a chimpanzee. But senior churchmen have been quick to dismiss the monkey as a highly-trained hoaxer... Nevertheless, Durham research scientist Gordon West is standing by his story that...'

In the bowels of Independent Television News, three engineers supervised the transmission as videotape machines whirled and monitors blinked. On twelve screens in front of them, the anchorman continued.

'...A chimpanzee has written a precise description of his former life in Liverpool. Well, hoax or not, we have exclusive pictures of the monkey writing about his prior existence as Ronald Bristow, an insurance salesman...'

Like acrid vapour condensing, two men appeared — all trilbies and trenchcoats — in the studio. The engineers turned towards them. 'Oy,' said one, 'the red light — no one comes in here during transmission.'

'We are no one.' From beneath the brim of his hat, the stranger's voice was like a skeletal hand sifting through dead leaves. 'You never saw us. Now be very good boys and give us the monkey tape.'

'You what?'

'You heard. You give us the tape. We don't give you a hard time.'

'The tape,' said the other trilby. 'Now!'

'I can't.'

'You want to bet?' said the men in unison, as they each drew a gun.

'VTR B, stand by,' said a loudspeaker.

The engineer ejected the tape from his machine and handed it over.

'VTR B, cue tape,' said the loudspeaker.

'You've got brains, you blokes. If you want to keep them inside your heads, we don't exist. Right?'

'VTR B, cue tape, for God's sake!'

Ashen-faced, the engineers nodded.

'**F**rom Durham,' said the anchorman,

Patrick Kelly reports... No, I'm sorry, we can't bring you that story... We'll endeavour to do

so before the end of the programme. Er, in the meantime, we move on to...'

'What the hell's going on?' said Gordon, leaping to his feet.

Then he saw the man with the gun standing in the doorway.

'There's a spanner in the works, my son,' the man said. 'And I'm the monkey wrench, if you get my meaning. So put your skates on, there's a good chap.'

He cocked the gun, it was the loudest sound that Gordon had ever heard.

Ronald turned away and buried his face in his hands.



More than a week later, at 10 Downing Street, the Prime Minister took a call on the red phone. On either side of the tray which carried her uneaten breakfast were strewn the morning papers. Alongside pictures of a chimpanzee and a late insurance salesman, one of the dailies carried a banner headline which read: HOAXER OR HEAVEN SENT? Then underneath: RUMOURS OF ACTION BY SECURITY SERVICES RAISE PUBLIC CURIOSITY TO FEVER PITCH.

From the radio blared the early news.

Demonstrations are planned in towns and cities across Britain today,' said the announcer.

'I know,' said the PM.

'...To mark the tenth day on which research scientist Gordon West and the chimpanzee — who allegedly possesses a human soul — have been missing from Durham. Scotland Yard say they believe that Mr West has gone into hiding to avoid exposure as a hoaxer.'

'Pardon,' said the PM, pressing the receiver close to her ear. She reached out and silenced the wireless. 'What? Yes. I know. The Western way of life straight down the loo — the john, I think you call it. I'll sort it out... I'm telling you, I'll sort it out. And don't worry. Goodbye... Bye.'

She cradled the phone, her eyes glinting grey, like bullets in the turning chamber of a revolver.

In a restored Tudor cottage in the middle of nowhere Gordon and Ronald were under guard. A tall man with no name was standing by the narrow window of the upstairs room, carefully cleaning his 9mm Browning automatic. As the man began to reassemble the stripped weapon, Gordon spoke up.

'How long are you going to keep us here?'

'Until I'm told otherwise,' said the man,

"And now I have returned home with a message which will liberate us all from the barren garden of the twentieth century"

putting the firing pin in place.

'Would you really kill us if we tried to escape?'

'Yes,' said the man, 'if I was ordered to.' He rammed the ammunition clip home.

'But Ronald here is a living miracle, proof that there is no oblivion, no annihilation, just... just change!'

'Then what are you worried about?' The guard placed a bullet in the chamber with a powerful but precise movement.



In the cabinet room of Number 10 the ministers gathered, conversing excitedly. The double doors opened to reveal the Prime Minister and absolute silence fell as she made her way to her place at the long table.

'Good morning, everyone,' she said, sitting down.

'Good morning, Prime Minister.'

'Please be seated. We haven't much time.'

The ministers did as they were told, then gazed towards her.

'We have a crisis on our hands.'

A murmur did a quick lap around the table, heads turned left and right.

'Metempsychosis.'

The murmur came to a halt at the Home Secretary, Kenneth Frazier.

'Metemwhat, PM?' he said,

'Metempsychosis. The transmigration of souls. Let's be clear about this straightaway. Whatever you may think now, we are dealing with a bona fide case of reincarnation. The chimpanzee, Ronald Bristow, has made a full statement to MI5.'

The murmur set off again, but this time it concerned designer drugs.

'Kenneth,' said the PM, 'the background, please.'

'Well, it appears that Durham University's Department of Applied Stochastics, funded by the C P Snow Two Cultures Foundation, was carrying out an experiment to test the notion that a collection of chimpanzees, if given word processors, might, according to the laws of probability, in time come up with a random masterpiece. Something by the Bard himself perhaps, or 'The Apes of Wrath', or maybe 'Clockwork Orang', or...'

'Cut the crap, Kenneth. You're about as funny as a mass grave.'

'Sorry, PM. As you're all doubtless well aware, it's alleged that one of the chimps began writing

his life story...'

'It is all true,' interjected the PM. 'I suggest we read what Mr Bristow has to say. I draw your attention to the material before you.'

The ministers lowered their heads, as if taking part in the prayers of an unfamiliar faith.

In manilla folders stamped INCREDIBLY SECRET! were copies of a typewritten document which told the following story.

'On Christmas Eve three years ago, I, the late Ronald Bristow, became monstrously drunk at the office party thrown by my employers, the Footindoor Life Assurance Company of Church Street, Liverpool. In the function room of the Clog and Billycock pub I pushed the boat out and sailed across a wide lake of cheap red wine. I was in search of oblivion for just a few short but sweet hours, an escape from a life withered and unlikely to bloom again.

'My journey was to prove longer than I expected. I was sucked into the whirlpool of life and deposited on the other side of the world, on another side of being. And now I have returned home, with a message which will liberate us all from the barren garden of the twentieth century.

To cut a long story short, I left the Clog and Billycock in the early hours, much the worse for wear. I was singing a rather unpleasant song remembered from childhood, and did not see the headlights of the last bus from town beaming towards me as I waltzed into the road.

I remember little following the impact, although I was intermittently conscious as doctors and nurses at the Royal Liverpool Hospital struggled to save my expiring human life. But try to revive me as they might, I was slipping relentlessly towards a new world of peculiar sounds. All was darkness, until a brightness began to form behind my eyes. I opened them and squinted towards the startling blue of an African sky and relished the warmth of my mother's furry embrace.

'It was strange, but I felt no sense of panic, even though I knew at once that I had been suspended between two lives. All was calm; all seemed right, I cannot properly describe my feelings.

'Life as a chimp was bliss, no selling insurance here, no more Footindoor, no more doors slammed in the face. No, this was a realm of pure knowledge of nature, of instinct, of mutual trust and caring. I was at one with the world.

'But then I was snared and drugged and

"The public want to believe: we must somehow strangle their desire to do so"

"Ladies and gentlemen, permit me to introduce Ronald Bristow, a rare, possibly unique, fusion of two lives"

returned to this country to take part in that lunatic experiment. On the boat I felt suicidal. But now I realise that some higher agency has brought me home to lift the heavy veil from everyone's eyes.

'I do not understand why Gordon and I are being held against our wills.

'You who rule can give the people the greatest gift of all: freedom from death. Please, delay no longer.'

The ministers raised their empty heads. The PM closed her manilla folder.

'Let me spell this out,' she said. 'If we fail to cover this one up, somehow, then we're finished. It's goodbye civilisation as we know it... as we like it. You must all appreciate that it is the fear of death, of extinction, which makes people aspire, encourages them to accumulate things so that they have something to show for their time on earth. We must suppress the truth. Transmigration, metempsychosis, reincarnation, call it what you will, has tapped a nerve. The public want to believe: we must somehow strangle their desire to do so. Any suggestions?'

The silence was as heavy as it was long. When, at last, the Home Secretary spoke up, a collective sigh of relief steamed up the windows.

'You're absolutely certain about this reincarnation business, PM?'

She nodded.

'Very well, let's run this one up the flagpole and see who salutes it. First we issue a statement, something like, 'Her Majesty's Government believes that the nation must no longer be left in any doubt about this matter of great public interest', something like that. Then we announce a press conference...'

The PM focussed hard. 'What?'

'Except the monkey at the press conference will not be the monkey, not Ronald Thingumyjig, but another lookalike ape, and when he's asked to write a message to the waiting world, it will be total gibberish! Believe me, the whole carry on will be so much silly season within a couple of days.'

'Brilliant!' said the PM. 'But what about Ronald Bristow? What happens to him?'

'Simple. Just pack him off to Lord Whatsname, chap with the nature reserve in the north, loyal party sort. Bristow stays there until he pops off without hindrance into another life, a life where he remembers nothing. Just keep him away from pen, paper and public. Does anyone know the lifespan of your average chim-

panzee?'

The PM reached out a hand towards the Home Secretary. 'I won't forget this,' she said softly.

Kenneth smiled a smile of lighthouse brilliance.

◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆

In the upstairs room of the cottage in the middle of nowhere the man with no name was pulling on a dark jacket. He beckoned to Gordon and Ronald.

'Come on, we're moving out.'

Gordon and Ronald held each other close, trembling. 'Where are we going?' Gordon's voice was a thrush-like warble.

'London.'

'What for?'

'A press conference. You're going to be famous.'

Man and monkey tightened their embrace. Gordon turned to Ronald.

'Just think,' he whispered, 'tomorrow the sun will rise on a brand new world, with everyone sharing the pure, undiluted joy of eternal being.'

'Hoo-hee-ccccccccck!'

Two black Jaguars with Ministry of Defence licence plates were

parked outside the cottage. Gordon was shown to one, Ronald to the other.

'Why separate cars?' Gordon asked.

The man with no name turned to another anonymous colleague. 'Security measure?' suggested the other man.

'Yes, that's right. Standard procedure for VIPs. Can't risk losing the pair of you, eh?'

As they hit the motorway Gordon began a one-way conversation with the man with no name.

'You know, whatever you may think, it's going to be a new and better world from this afternoon on.'

'Really.'

'Oh yes, a world free from the shadow of death. A bright world where acquisition means nothing, and all life is precious. We'll all share new values and new dreams. New hopes and new things to say, a million things to talk about.'

'Really.'

No more nonsense about the world's pain followed by eternal bliss in Paradise. No more terror of the absolute void of death and the worms nibbling away at your mortal remains. No more fast food bars serving your relatives between two halves of a sesame seed bun...

'Really.'

'Oh yes,' said Gordon. 'Oh yes.'

Behind them the second Jag peeled away down a slip road and was replaced by a third containing a chimp doing somersaults in the back seat.

Ronald realised immediately what was going on. He hammered his fists against the rear window, as a sign pointing North hurtled by. He thumped and beat and punched, and then stopped, distressed and exhausted, pressing his forehead against his bleeding hands.

Four hours later, at Downing Street, the Prime Minister switched on the TV. She saw Gordon standing on a platform before a bouquet of microphones; he was addressing the world's press. Besides him was a word processor linked to an enormous video screen.

'...And so it was revealed to me that this human life about which we worry so much is merely a small part of a great cycle of existence, and I discovered the peace which passeth all understanding. And very soon, everyone the world over will feel as I do...'

The Prime Minister crossed her legs tight and giggled.

Gordon felt unbearably hot beneath the powerful TV lights. He loosened his collar.

Ladies and gentlemen, permit me to introduce Ronald Bristow, a rare, possibly unique, fusion of two lives.' He extended his hand towards the wings.

Behind a curtain an MI5 agent was holding hands with a reluctant chimp, a dead ringer for Ronald. The agent allowed the monkey a glimpse of the hunch seedless grapes he had secreted beneath his double-breasted jacket.

'Come on son,' he rasped.

Television cameras panned and zoomed as the pair walked on stage, still cameras clicked and flashbulbs popped, punctuating a murmur of anticipation from the audience.

The chimp climbed onto the table next to the word processor and sat there, bemused.

'Ronald,' said Gordon, 'you have the floor.' The monkey jumped up and down, screeching. The press giggled.

In Number 10 the PM squirmed with delight.

'Go on, Ronald,' said Gordon, a nervous timbre in his voice. 'Write a message to the world.'

The monkey shrieked and put its leg behind its head. The giggles of the press became full-blown laughter.

'Ronald... Ronald?' Gordon seemed to feel his flesh dripping away from his bones. There was a

vacuum where his stomach should have been.

But at last, to Gordon's ecstatic relief, the chimp he thought was Ronald noticed the keyboard, and became interested. He shuffled into position, Gordon smiled and made a gesture not unlike those made by magicians' assistants. But then, to his horror, the chimp, flailing each of his sinewy limbs, began to hammer the keys — with his hands and feet.

The press began to shriek and scream with laughter.

At Number 10, the Prime Minister almost fell off her chair.

But back in the hall one of the journalists jumped to her feet.

'Look!' she yelled, pointing towards the screen.

The others followed her gaze, and the laughter ceased. Words were forming in bright green letters six inches high. Cameras focussed, motor drives whirled, and pens scribbled frantically on shorthand pads.

TO DIE 2 SLEEP TO SLEEP PERCHANCE TO DREAM

I THERES THE RUB FOR IN THAT SLEEP OF DETH

WHAT DREAMZ MAY CUM WHEN WE HAVE SHUFFLED OFF

THIS MORTAL COIL?

Silence fell, but only for the briefest of moments. Then the press surged forwards, TV crews jostled for the best shot, journalists formed a scrum around Gordon and the chimp, who was now standing on his head. Urgent questions were fired into the throng. But Gordon could not reply; he just beamed and ran his fingers through his hair like a character in a shampoo commercial.

Then somebody decided to raise Gordon onto their shoulders. Someone else had the same idea about the monkey who wasn't Ronald Bristow. Others helped, and within seconds all were surging from the hall and out into the street to proclaim the Millennium, the dawn of a Golden Age free of the crippling fear of death.

Meanwhile back at Number 10 the PM raised the remote control box weakly and killed the TV picture. She sat slumped in her chair for at least five minutes. Then, slowly, she turned to the mirror above the mantel and met the wide eyed gaze of her reflection.

'Good God,' she whispered to her likeness, 'just how unlucky can you get?'

The red phone began to ring.

She didn't answer.

"Gordon seemed to feel his flesh dripping away from his bones"

"Do you
want
custard with
your dwarf...
or would you
prefer
cream?"



A BAD SEASON FOR

Colin
Davis

'Do you want custard with your dwarf,' I muttered to myself, 'or would you prefer cream?'

DESSERT FREAKS, proclaimed the florid lettering. The desert, I suppose, representing the exotic. I didn't smile. The sombre showman didn't invite mirth; besides, he couldn't have painted the sign. He had no hands.

Inside, it wasn't much of a show: two-headed kitten in a jar, stuffed five-legged calf (badly moth-eaten) and a peeling fork-tailed snake, also stuffed. Otherwise, just blown up photographs on the rickety walls. Still, it was nice to see old favourites: Jo-Jo the Dog-Faced Boy, the Mule-Faced Woman, the Three-Legged Man, Seventy-Six Stone Robert Earl Hughes, giants, dwarves,

stomach-turning human pincushions smiling with skewered lips, wagging impaled tongues...

But there was an absentee. Upon leaving I asked the sombre man: 'No picture of the Big-Handed Boy? Someone told me he used to work at this fair.'

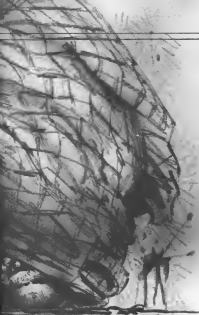
The man stared at me for a moment, then shrugged.

'I'm the Big-Handed Boy.'

'I — I didn't mean to pry,' I managed at length, 'but I'm writing a book about freak shows, and I was hoping —'

'To see the Big-Handed Boy. Well, you have. Tell you what,' he pointed a hook in the direction of a nearby café, 'there's no punters about tonight. Stand me a steak and I'll give you a story you didn't bargain for.'

Over an excellent steak and lousy coffee, I listened. Charlie Croxley had been a freak, and a rare one. There was once a Big-Fingered Boy in America, but Charlie's own qualifications began at the wrists: hands a foot long and seven inches



FREAKS

across the palm. For practical purposes they were of less use than his present hooks, but they were a living. He'd had his own show, and fared reasonably well.

But ever since the thalidomide tragedy, freak shows seemed to be of questionable taste; business fell off, and in the end Charlie took his savings to America. Signed by a touring carnival within a week, he'd surely found his Utopia. Then came Chicago.

Returning to the site from a bar one night, Charlie was coaxed and dragged into a derelict warehouse where his hands were cut off.

Patrolling cops found him before he bled to death, but his assailant was never traced. Neither were his hands.

That was a year ago. He returned home, and scraped a living with his present seedy show. When I told him that the bulk of my research would take place in the USA, he observed merely that I should watch my step. I should have listened to his advice.



I caught up with the carnival in Hicksville,

Wisconsin. It really was called Hicksville, after one Jonas Hick; the locals didn't take kindly to obvious jokes. I soon learned that the highest selection of freaks worked for Cohen's Giant Carnival, and I'd been with them for a week, walking every day from my cheap lodgings to the site on the outskirts of town.

It was the big day — a new freak's debut. I stood amongst the crowd in front of the freshly painted sign, BARNEY THE BIG FOOT BOY, and listened to like the harker doing his spiel.

'You've heard of Big Foot, folks, but you ain't seen him, ain't no carnival got him, ain't no zoo got him, and why? 'Coe when he heard about Barney's feet, he was too damn ashamed to come outta the mountains! Barney started life a hare-foot boy, and he stayed that way... The boots ain't never been made to fit him!'

People drifted inside, and I knew they'd get their money's worth, for I'd seen a preview. Barney's feet — twenty inches long and eight wide — were probably just as killed, the highest ever.

Barney and I became friends: he was Canadian, but his father was English. There was a bar in downtown Hicksville, near the site, where we would sit late most evenings, swapping questions. Charlie Croxley had not been with Cohen's, by the way, but all the freaks knew about him, and I underplayed my interest, not wanting to seem morbid. Most of the carnies frequented another bar, rather far away for Barney to drag his huge feet, so when I walked him back to his trailer we were usually alone.

'Hold on, Pete, I got to take a leak,' said Barney, making for a convenient alley. I sat down gratefully on the kerb while he clumped out of sight. We'd sunk a good sample of the local brew that night. There was a silence as presumably he took his leak.

Then, a bestial yell.

Sober in a second, unthinkingly rather than heroically, I plunged down the alley. Barney lay in a spreading pool of blood; a dark, hulky figure knelt beside him. Even as I stumbled to a halt, peering in the dim light, I saw the gleam of metal, and then there was a juicy thud. Jesus Christ, it was his foot! He'd chopped off Barney's foot!

Fumbling with a bag, the figure scrambled up and ran straight towards me. The blade swished past my ear, spattering my face with warm drops. I ducked, and the attacker was gone.

I saw, unbelievably, that both Barney's feet

"The blade swished past my ear, spattering my face with warm drops"

were gone. My lips contracted in an involuntary rictus of nausea as I made myself examine him with eyes now accustomed to the twilight.

The severed bones, splintery white, red-marrowed, protruded from the mangled flesh like obscene candy sticks, and the blood seemed to be beyond stemming. Christ, why hadn't I studied First Aid? Tourniquets — I had to make tourniquets. Sobbing with despair, I tugged at my shirt. Have you ever tried tearing a shirt with your hands?

Barney groaned: he would soon be conscious. My belt! Luckily he wore one too, and I managed to twist them around the gushing stumps just as he came to. Then I ran to the end of the alley and yelled for help, shouting the louder to drown Barney's cries.



What are you going to do now, Pete — move on with us?

I don't think so, Al. The bloody police want another statement, and after that... I might go home. No offence, but I've had enough of freak shows and carnivals for now.

We sat in Al Cohen's big trailer the evening before the carnival left Hicksville.

'Can't say I blame you,' Cohen looked relieved. 'To be honest, some of the freaks are worried you might bring bad luck, what with Charlie Croxley and all. You know how superstitious carnies can be.'

I was feeling a bit superstitious myself. I'd met Charlie after he had been maimed. Barney I saw being maimed. What next? Would I discover that I was part of the action? The police had thanked me for my help, but they were obviously baffled. Of course they mentioned Charlie without my prompting, and agreed that other freaks must be at risk, if only from copycat crimes.

It really might be best to go home, I thought. Anyhow, I'd visit Barney at the hospital in Milwaukee, then decide.

Next day, strolling across the windswept field as the last trailer pulled away, I kicked at the empty Coke cans and candy wrappers and decided it would be stupid not to take advantage of my involvement. I would not abandon my book; it might be different, but it would probably sell better. I didn't need to talk to Cohen's freaks any more, I had adequate material. I would spend my dwindling funds on phone calls and continue my research at a safe distance, from New York.



For a month I worked on the 'new' book, still uncertain of its direction, balancing phone costs against meals. Once, I splashed out on travel, visiting a charming old lady whose beard was quite white and who had long retired to Connecticut. She didn't feel threatened. 'And if I did, well, all I have to do is shave!' Naturally, I was waiting for another act of butchery; every day I scanned the newspapers with guilty anticipation.

One afternoon — I wouldn't have risked it after dark — I visited a sleazy 42nd Street cinema to catch the 1933 film *Freaks*. 42nd Street generally specialises in different fare, and it was porn that was under discussion in the drugstore I visited for a sandwich.

'— must have been the biggest ever. But he sure as hell won't be making any more pictures.'

'Not unless he has a transplant.'

'Yeah? Where would they find another dick like that? The man was a freak.'

Through a mouthful of ham I asked who they were talking about.

'Donnie Vernon, who else? Donnie the Dong. Biggest tool in pictures. Some nut jumped him last night, lopped his dick off. Poor guy could have lived to death.'

'Did they — did they find it?' I asked.

'His dick? No — how did you guess? You a collector?'

They all laughed. No, I thought; but somebody is. Maybe this had no connection with the other cases — a porn actor would naturally encounter some strange people. But I had a chilly conviction that Mr Vernon's pride and joy was now in the company of Charlie's hands and Barney's feet.

Next day I got a letter from Barney. Though I'd expected he would want to forget carnival life, he was still keen to help me with the book. He reckoned I'd saved him from bleeding to death. He had interesting news: about twelve years ago, Al Cohen's father, Fred, had missed out on a freak. A rare case, perhaps unique — a big-headed boy. Barney knew no details, only that Cohen had failed to sign the boy.

It took a while to locate the carnival, but at length I heard Al's familiar rasp on the phone. At first he was dubious: would the Big-Headed Boy want to talk to me, even if I found him? After all, a head might be just what someone was after. But he told me...

**"He loomed
about seven
feet high
and bulked
half as wide,
teeth
flashing
through
tangled
beard in a
ferocious
grin"**

Cohen Sr had heard of the boy, who was fourteen at the time, from a doctor in a little Nebraska town. His father had kept him hidden since birth, and reacted to the offer of a contract by threatening to blow the head off the next carnie who called. That was that. The informant supplied details and even a photograph, now lost, but which Al had seen.

The Big-Headed Boy (when Al said it, you heard the capital letters) was special. The rest of him was, if anything, undersized. His face was normal enough, but it was stuck on the front of the biggest head anyone ever saw, bigger in circumference than a man's waist. It wasn't water on the brain — hydrocephalus don't live long — but some obscure condition covering the skull with spongy tissue, solid-looking but light enough for the boy to hold up.

'He'd only be twenty-six,' mused Al. 'Years ahead of him.'

'Perhaps he's well out of it,' I said, 'with this nutcase around. At least the others are still alive. A man's head is what you call essential.'

'But you're going to visit him, right? Say, maybe the old man's dead or senile...'

'Or poor enough to bribe? I'll tell him you're interested.'

'Thanks, Pete. Watch out for shotguns!'



Here I was in Hicksville again: lower case this time, I thought, looking out my window at Oak Bluff main street, quiet as an Edward Hopper painting but a hell of a lot less interesting. I zipped the case of my portable, giving up the pretence of work, and lit a cigarette. Would Jimmy Workitt ring this evening?

The second thing I'd done in Oak Bluff was hire Jimmy, a local loafer, to watch for the return of the Big-Headed Boy's father, who'd gone away a few days ago. Before that, of course, I'd called on the sheriff to find out if the Dawsons still lived in the district. The news, though worth a few paragraphs in the masterwork, was hardly encouraging.

Not long after Fred Cohen's ill-received offer, the boy had died in a fall at the isolated house, and old man Dawson was left alone with his grief, his wife having committed suicide many years before. His weekly drinking sessions had ceased; the habitués of the Acorn Bar didn't miss the big, bitter man with the short fuse. Apart from monthly visits in his old station wagon for

provisions, Oak Bluff never saw him. Wife and son were buried at the house, and Sheriff Adams' laconic opinion was that I would be too, if I poked my nose in the family tragedy.

I didn't see myself as the Intrepid Reporter. If things got dangerous researching this book, well, I'd simply change the bloody book. But it would do no harm to have a look at the Dawson place, and if I could get a word with the old man, fine.

I switched on the ancient monochrome TV and prepared for a boring evening, wishing I could afford a six-pack. Wrestling... Pictures of the night's contestants flashed on the screen: eccentrically costumed, extravagantly built. Particularly Grizzly Bear Grogan. He loomed about seven feet high and hulked half as wide, teeth flashing through tangled beard in a ferocious grin...

But what was the announcer saying?

'...the Grizzly Bear won't be topping the hill tonight, fans. He was to have fought the Mangler, but last night the Bear mysteriously disappeared. How can anyone that size disappear?' you'll ask, but seriously, everyone's concerned. No trace at last report, so if you're out there, GB, all mat fans hope you're OK and want you back.'

Ten minutes later Jimmy called. Dawson had put his car in the barn twenty minutes ago and Jimmy had hastened to the nearest phone, he said, breathing hard to prove it. Too late for visiting tonight. I'd go in the morning. So I thanked Jimmy and decided maybe I could afford a beer.

At ten the following morning, optimistically packing my tape recorder, I set off in a hired car for the Dawson place, some miles out of town. Swinging off the freeway, I entered a region of broadleaf woods, oaks and sycamores crowding close to the unfenced country road. Mentally noting details for the book, I was excited and a little afraid. How many people are shot, almost casually, in America? This unhappy old man would bear watching, possibly from a safe distance.

The house, when I reached it, was unimpressive: a plain wood building, recently painted, but crudely, to preserve not beautify. It looked deserted, and my knocks and rings were unanswered, though I thought I glimpsed someone peeking through a window.

Now what? Dawson was probably inside, so I wasn't about to break in. They do that in films, usually with dire results. It seemed feeble simply to give up and go, but that was a damn sight preferable to both barrels of a shotgun. Perhaps I could leave a note, asking him to get in touch.

"The enormity of it brought my guts pushing at my chest in anger, then dropping to my bowels in fear"

Not that he would...

The door opened.

Frozen in the act of reaching for pen and notebook, I peered at the figure silhouetted in the doorway.

'What you want, mister?'

'Er, are you Mr Dawson?'

'Yes. What you want?'

No chance of leading gradually up to the point... I took a deep breath.

'Please don't think I'm impertinent, but I wanted to talk to you about — your son'

He took a deep breath in his turn, and stiffened. I got ready to duck, but after a moment he spoke in the same flat voice.

'Well, I don't know about that. But you better come in anyhow.'

Inside, the house smelt musty, obviously neglected since his wife died. He led me into a dingy parlour and we sat on kitchen chairs at a bare table. We looked at each other. He was about sixty, big-boned, with heavy ill-shaven face and lustreless eyes.

'What you want, mister? You ain't a goddam carnie, or you wouldn't be sitting here. Who are you?'

I must have sounded comic, larding my explanation with apologies, fervently disclaiming cheap curiosity, but he listened without a flicker of expression. When I ran out of words, he rose silently and stalked from the room. Was he fetching the shotgun? Why hadn't I stayed on a provincial newspaper, writing up flower shows?

Dawson returned with a bottle of whiskey and two glasses. Surprisingly, it was quite good; I certainly needed it. Tilting back his chair, he reached a box from a shelf and rummaged in it, producing a dog-eared photograph.

'Take a good look, mister.'

It was a snapshot of a boy of about twelve standing against a clapboard wall, probably this house. Fred Cohen's informant had been right, and God, how Cohen's carnie mouth must have watered. A boy in overalls, a smile on his heavy Dawson face. But behind the smile, behind it, above it and around it, a grotesque penumbra, was a truly enormous head. You know that style of caricature where the identifying head is stuck on a tiny puppet-like body? That was the effect.

Dawson had left his chair and now stood behind me, staring as if the picture were new to him too. He was breathing quickly.

'Something ain't it? Worth coming all the way from England, ain't it? I — I got to get some-

thing.'

He strode from the room, clearly overcome. I was suddenly sorry for him, as I ought to have been all along, but I couldn't tear my gaze from the photograph. Dawson's heavy footsteps returned, and I noticed a strange smell. Then something was clamped over my face.

Groping blindly, I got hold of his wrist, then somehow managed to trip him. We fell, but his grip wasn't broken, and the ether dragged me down into sickly sweet darkness...

I coughed and retched, shaking my head to rid it of the clinging fumes, and with an effort opened my eyes. For long seconds I could not focus, and it took longer for my brain to collate the images before me. I was in another room, tied to a chair.

Christ, I was tied to the chair! The enormity of it brought my guts pushing at my chest in anger, then dropping to my bowels in fear. Dawson watched me with stolid satisfaction. He'd donned a stained apron over his shabby clothes, and stood next to a large table. Strapped to that table was the naked figure of a man. A giant, surely seven feet tall, muscled like a gorilla.

One huge forearm bore a tattoo. My befuddled brain slowly grasped the design. It was a bear.

A grizzly bear.

'You know who this is, mister?' Dawson laughed, an oddly high snigger from a big man. 'Reckon you do, you being an expert on freaks. And now, I got to get on. Don't you start yellin', or I'll gag you tight, like him.'

Grogan was gagged with wide packing tape. Dawson fetched a trolley, and when I saw what was on it, I did start yelling.

Ranged on chipped plates, as on some grisly lunch trolley, were five objects. Five pieces of meat. Two pairs and a single item. A pair of hands. A pair of feet. A penis.

I knew the feet. Not by their shape, but by their size: they were the feet hacked from my friend Barney, no longer the Big-Foot Boy. And I knew the sources of the other things.

It had been Dawson in the alley in Hicksville. He'd tried to kill me then; what were my chances now? I choked back my shout of horror as he loomed over me, and he sniggered again, dropping the bony fist he'd raised at my cry.

'That's right, mister, you keep good and quiet. I got to concentrate when I'm workin'. Mister Grogan here, he'll squeal some, but he's gagged, and I can stand it. You should of let me put you to sleep gentle, but no, you had to fight and spill

**"Ranged on
chipped
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Five pieces
of meat"**

the ether, so now you got to watch him wriggle. Oh, he's under, but I doubt he'll keep sleepin' when I begin.'

'Why him?' I asked, not recognising my own voice. 'He's not a freak.'

'Ain't he, now? What else would you call a man seven feet tall? Sure, there's bigger in the carnivals, but look at this good body. See those muscles?' He prodded Grogan like a farmer with a prize bull.

'But what have you got against freaks?'

Again the snigger.

'Why, nothin'. I love 'em. Otherwise, why would I take the risk, bringin' 'em here? Well - parts of 'em. I reckon you're dyin' to know what I got in mind, so I'll tell you. Don't interrupt, I got work to do, froze meat don't keep long when it's thawed. Got to get the blood movin'.'

'Get the... What the hell are you talking about?'

His smile vanished and he raised his fist again.

'I said don't interrupt. It's all for my boy, my poor boy. I got to fit him up right before I bring him back. I killed him, but I'll set that right and he'll be better than he was.'

'You killed him?'

'That damn carnie, that bastard Cohen, when he came sniffing round to sign up Davey, he convinced him. Davey wanted to go with the goddam show, said it was a living, he didn't want to stay laid away... Dawson stopped, his voice breaking, tears on the stony face. 'What could I do? I tried to talk him round, but he wouldn't listen, and I got him by the shoulders and shook him, and that big head of his, it jerked, and his neck broke. God, I nearly went mad...'

So that, I thought, was when you went mad.

'I buried him with his ma and then, when I was alone, I dug him up and put him in the freezer, and there he's laid since. Now I'm ready to fit him up and bring him back to life.'

I gaped, beyond words.

'If I'd got the notion when his ma - went, I could of brought her back too. That would have been easier. She died when Davey was two... Hanged herself in the barn. She was ashamed, birthing a freak. She's gone, but I'll bring him back, and he'll look right this time. Now you know why I been doing these things.'

'But he's been dead twelve years. You can't think -'

'I can. He's been froze every minute of the time, ain't no different from the day he... died.

I'm gonna cut off his head and fit it on Mr Grogan's body, and I'm gonna fit up the other parts, and Davey will be a real pretty giant instead of a big-headed freak.'

'But, for God's sake,' I whispered, 'even if you do that, you can't bring Davey back to life.'

Dawson looked down at me with more contempt than anger.

'You think, because I never went to college, I can't do nothin'. Electricity, mister. I'm gonna run power through him until he jumps right back to life.'

'But - you're going to cut his head off.'

'And fit it to another body,' he said patiently. 'A nice, strong, fresh body, full of fresh blood. And if I need some extra blood to prime things, well, you ought to be kept quiet anyway, after Hicksville...'

He left the room, and I recalled an old news item, a precedent for Dawson's fantasy. Years ago, in England, a man dug up his dead mother. He tried to feed her glucose solution, which he called 'plasma', and when he was discovered, there were hurns on the corpse's feet where he had connected them to the mains. It is possible, even in this TV documentary age, to believe such things, if you are goaded by grief and madness. Maybe the documentaries even help, providing nuggets of half-comprehended science.

Dawson came back, tenderly cradling a hundle wrapped in a dripping cloth. His son's head. He laid it carefully on the trolley beside the other fragments, and picked up a small saw. On cue, like a musician responding to the tap of the conductor's baton, Grogan groaned through his gag and rolled his head sideways. Dawson bent over the pinioned feet and my eyes met Grogan's, which were beginning to focus.

Then the wrestler glared wildly and his neck muscles stood out like cables.

I couldn't stop my gaze from travelling down the straining body to Dawson. He was, he really was, he was saving the fucking foot off! The ugly sound of sundering flesh gave way to the rasp of saw on bone, and Grogan arched even more frantically, but the straps held.

Dawson lifted away the foot, severing the last connecting shreds with a casual saw stroke, tossed the foot aside, and briskly attacked the other leg. Grogan was still; he must have passed out. I prayed he wouldn't come round, but he opened his eyes as Dawson discarded the other foot and reached for one of the giant feet on the trolley.

"The ugly sound of sundering flesh gave way to the rasp of saw on bone"

Sweat stung my eyes and I couldn't wipe it away, but I stared in fascinated disbelief as Dawson shoved the dead meat against the blood-bolted stump and picked up... a stapling machine. A bloody stapling machine, the heavy duty kind they use in warehouses. Defiantly he fixed the foot in place, then wrapped the joint with the same packing tape his victim was gagged with.

Past horror, I felt like giggling at the mundane literal-mindedness of the man. If he believed the dead foot would function on that fresh-hacked stump, was it because he was raving mad, or because he was too damn stupid to grasp that it couldn't? Somehow, the second alternative seemed worse.

I dragged my gaze from Dawson's mad assembly job to his victim's face. There was an awful irony in the sight of the wrestler, used to simulating pain, now punbed to the far reaches of unfeigned agony. Grunt and groan, indeed. I don't know if he saw me.

Looking away from Grogan's face, I was just in time to see the downward slash at his groin. I squeezed my eyes shut and tried not to hear the slash of cut flesh. When I looked again, Dawson was taking the saw to Grogan's hands. He had masked the wrestler's lower body, but Donnie Vernon's penis was gone from the trolley, and I knew it was neatly stapled and taped, playing a role stranger than any it ever did on the screens of 42nd Street. The table, Dawson's apron, the floor around him, were now a uniform scarlet.

The saw rasped across the giant's wrist. Numb, I watched dispassionately as if I were viewing computer-generated images. That was the right hand; now Dawson was stapling Charlie Croxley's in its place; now the saw bit into the left wrist, but this was hidden from me by the shuddering bulk of Grogan. Dawson took the other giant hand from the trolley and worked quickly — practice making perfect. He stood back, head cocked on one side, admiring his work, then tenderly picked up the bundle, unwrapping it with gentle fingers.

The face was horrible: twelve years in a freezer does not improve the complexion. Dawson, handling the relic lovingly, seemed unaware of its condition. He set the thing carefully beside Grogan, selected a big butcher knife, and laid the edge delicately against his neck...

Grogan struck out.

Somehow, mutilated and blood-drained, he summoned a final effort and broke the strap on

his right arm. A massive forearm slammed on the back of Dawson's neck, clamping his head against Grogan's chest and jolting the knife from his hand.

They struggled silently, one gagged, the other half throttled. Dawson was a big man, still strong despite his age, but he was like a boy in the embrace of Grogan. Yet... he was wriggling free, for Grogan's skin was slippery with blood and sweat, and he could not grip his man — the dead giant hand flopped limply, like a cloth puppet's.

Dawson seemed on the point of escape when Grogan gave a convulsive twist of his torso and tore his other arm free, pulling it through the strap, sending the dead hand flipping through the air into my lap. I was beyond further revulsion. In his struggles Dawson had half turned, so now Grogan's other arm caught him across the throat. Scarcely a sound escaped him as Grogan, with his remaining strength, choked him to death. At last Dawson stopped kicking and the wrestler flopped back, letting him slip to the floor.

There was silence except for Grogan's tortured breathing and the heavy drip of blood. Suddenly I shuddered, and the hand fell. Slowly Grogan's head turned towards me. There was no doubt that he saw me this time. If he had not observed it before, he now took in my helpless situation. His eyes, lids drooping as his life ebbed, met mine. He could not speak, I could find nothing to say. We both knew it was impossible for me, of normal strength, to break free, but still I felt ashamed, and looked away before he did.

When I looked up again, he was dabbing with feeble frustration at the straps with the stumps of his arms. It was so pathetic. I could feel tears on my face, trickling as his blood still trickled. It would soon be over. Lying on the floor where it had fallen, Davey Dawson's great head watched me with dead dispassionate eyes.

Slowly I focused on my own plight. Lethargic Jimmy would come for his last payment and find me gone from the hotel. How long before he mustered the initiative to go for help?



Yes, Jimmy did go to the sheriff. But he took a long time about it — too long. As I said, Dawson had tied me tightly and, well, that is bad for the circulation. The doctors had to amputate my hands.



COLIN DAVIS, born in Hereford in 1934, has had various boring jobs from civil servant to vending machine operator. He has contributed stories and articles to *Fiesta*, *Mystery*, *Shock*, *Xpress*, and to anthologies including *Fontana's Great Horror Stories*. A science fiction novel, *The Pleasure Domes of Sigma 93*, was published in 1976.

"The face was horrible: twelve years in a freezer does not improve the complexion"

ANGRY MAN

DARRELL SCHWEITZER



Damn them all. His rage was an inexplicable knot within him, impenetrable, Gordian, never to be untangled or cut or understood.

Damn them all to Hell. He stood there on the train platform in the morning mist, hating. It was an active thing, something he *did* rather than merely felt, a task continuously carried out.

A young woman approached him, asking the time. He merely turned away. Her face went pale and slack, and she backed off, stuttering. A pack of school kids laughed and danced and shoved one another on the far end of the platform. *Damn them all. Radios the size of suitcases, but no damn books.* He glared, and they too backed away, silent.

He could project his anger through his eyes, like rays, like Superman's *dama-you-all* X-ray

vision... and the thought was amusing, for all it didn't make him any less angry.

Gradually the platform filled with early morning commuters carrying briefcases, glancing at their wristwatches, rustling their newspapers, muttering among themselves: 'Well, this is SEPTA after all... shoulda' brought camping gear... we're right on time, but this is yesterday's train...'

Damn them all.

As the sun rose higher, the mist thinned, revealing the long, silver box of a train car sitting no more than a hundred yards beyond the end of the platform.

Even after several minutes, the car did not move. Sunlight glinted off the windows. The power gear on top touched the overhead wires like the arms of a metallic spider gently caress-

ing its web.

After several minutes more a freight train went roaring by on the second track, buffeting everyone who stood on the platform, snatching newspapers and a couple of hats from the unwary, flattening the spiked hairdos of the school kids.

Damn them —

It gave him the opportunity for abstract thought. Somehow, inside his mind, he stepped away from his knotted rage and considered that if the outside track had a freight train on it, then any commuter train on that track had to be far behind, just leaving the Paoli yard now. Unless the other train, that single car sitting there, suddenly came to life, no one was going anywhere for a good long while.

Going where?

He realised, to his surprise, that he didn't know where he was going. The abstracted part of himself had placed the angry self into a kind of isolation ward, and now, in the corridor outside, it could rationally babble to itself: Name, *Albert Lovell*, age, *forty-three*, place of residence, *Six-seventy-two Croton Road*, occupation, *Senior Vice President, Fairfield-McDaniel Electronics* — and so on, like the responses to an interrogation, name, rank, serial number.

The angry *other* inside him was like an endless tape-loop, *damn-them-all-damn-them-all* and it wasn't going to tell him very much.

Are you married, Mister Lovell?

There was a sharp pain at that, searing agony, a knife-blade twisted through his memory. He began to sob softly — still angry, the *other*, the someone-else still a throbbing mass of fury.

People are staring.

Damn them all.

Hit a nerve, eh?

Again he stood back from himself, opening another isolation ward, shoving the unclean *other* inside; and the grief, the pain, were someone else's, along with the anger. He was reproducing like a cell in biology class, splitting off, and now there were three, one of them furious, one of them sorrowing, the third wondering when the damn train would start up, where Albert Lovell thought he was going this fine spring morning, and what Albert Lovell was so wrought-up about.

Damn them all.

Oh God, Janet! Oh, God —

So you are married, Mister Lovell. Is that it? A tiff with the wife?

He could not say. It was like a wiring diagram on tracing paper, all thin blue and red lines so faint they could hardly be made out. Whatever, it was something one of the other Albert Lovells had experienced. It was someone else's pain and mess, something he'd only vaguely overheard in the muttered conversation while standing among commuters.

'...my appointment...'

'...plane...'

Still the single car sat gleaming in the sun, completely revealed now. The mist had burned off. The car's windows were dark, like a row of staring eyes. Some distance behind, a dog trotted gingerly across the tracks.

'...at least an hour since I got here,' someone said.

'...Jesus Christ, are they all dead in there?'

Damn them all. Albert Lovell, numbers one, two, three, all of him, started walking, no, marching toward the end of the platform, toward the stalled car.

Too short for a rush-hour train anyway. One damn car? By the time we get to Bryn Mawr there'll be people hanging from the luggage racks.

Damn them —

Walking. Onto the crunching gravel now.

He hadn't walked along the edge of the tracks since he was a child, back when it was forbidden and therefore everybody did it —

People are staring.

As he neared the train car, he heard faint sounds from it, metal creaking, *pinging* from heat and stress and clutching brakes. He stared up at it, as if at a wall. He stood right in the middle of the tracks, daring the train to run him down. But the two-eyed metal face regarded him blankly.

Then, feeling a little foolish — but still angry, implacably angry, that *other's* anger like a fiat of white-hot iron — he stepped down to the edge of the tracks again and walked along the stalled car. The door at the front, where the engineer would be, was closed, of course. He reached up and slapped his hand against the metal.

Back on the platform, one of the school kids shouted something.

He kept on going, to the far end, where passengers would board.

That door was closed too.

'Hey!'

He pounded on the metal with his fist, so hard his wedding ring left dents.

"His rage was an inexplicable knot within him, impenetrable, Gordian, never to be untangled or cut or understood"

Damn them —

He wished he had a cane or a stick or an umbrella, something he could use to hang on the door higher up, or on one of the windows to get the attention of the crew inside. This car hadn't just materialized here. Someone drove it. No crewmen had debarbed, so they still had to be on board. It only made sense.

Part of Albert Lovell, the part which felt no anger or pain, very reasonably came to that conclusion.

He reached into his coat pocket and felt something cold and hard, like a hammer. He drew it out and saw that it was a pistol, a big one, the size of a policeman's revolver.

And all of him felt pain then, as he clutched the vertical hand-hold by the side of the door and hung there, weeping, using his free hand to pound on the door with the butt of the pistol.

He could smell gunpowder. The pistol had been fired recently.

But that happened to someone else. He, Albert Lovell IV, stood apart from it all, merely cataloguing the grief and rage and bewilderment of the others, quietly insulated from pain.

It was merely the object of curiosity to him when the train door *did* open.

Still clutching the pistol by the barrel in his right hand, he caught the inner, curved hand-hold with his left and heaved himself up onto the steps, into the train.

Damn them all.

Janet. Oh, God —

o daddy we love you daddy don't hurt mommy daddy please o — !

Do you have any children, Mister Lovell?

He knelt there on the steps, weeping once more, shaking uncontrollably, trying simultaneously to remember and to forget, to rip the wound open in a burst of pain and revelation, to cover it up, hide it, pretend it wasn't there; to untangle the screaming knot inside his head — until yet another Albert Lovell neatly filed it all away in a drawer.

Not me. That happened to someone else. Not me.

He put his shoulder against the inner door and pushed his way into the car.

'Hello — ?'

The first thing he noticed was the smell, a dead smell, like the Augean Stables, like a dirty, old, possibly abandoned butcher shop, like garbage, like roadkill roasting in the sun — like

all that, but fainter, far away, dried and forgotten for a very long time.

(...Jesus Christ, are they all dead in there?)

Damn.

For the first time he felt his anger beginning to unravel, blossoming like one of those Japanese paper flowers you drop into water. He remembered the screaming, Janet screaming every obscenity either of them knew while he stood there, facing her down, silent in cold rage, his hands on his hips.

Then he had laughed. 'Are you *quite* finished?'

Back then. He had. That other, who remembered.

(...Jesus... are they all... ?)

Damn them, yes.

He took one step along the aisle. The old lady in the seat to the right was indeed dead, had been for a long time, for all she still clutched her pocketbook primly; her eyes were shut tight, her lips puckered as if she were about to kiss someone, her throat cut so wide that another, huge mouth gaped there and her head tilted at an impossible angle, about ready to fall off. She smelled like filthy straw.

The man in the seat with her was little more than a skeleton in a tattered, double-breasted suit with shiny silver buttons. He lay across the woman's lap like a sleeping child, staring up at her, one bony hand dangling down toward the floor.

The seat to the left was empty. But there was a boy in the one in front of it. About fourteen. He could have been one of the kids with the boom-boxes, save that he was neatly dressed in a jacket and tie, his red hair impeccably combed. He lay on his side as if he were asleep, but the whole downward half of his face was bruised where blood had pooled.

Albert Lovell could not weep now, of course, or even call out. He — all of his many selves — was beyond that now. He walked down the aisle in a state of flawless anaesthesia. Yes, it was happening to someone else. Yes, *he* was only an observer, an outsider, peering in at the world and all its strangeness, watching someone else's nightmare like an old flick on some Creature Feature, wondering all the while what that someone else was feeling and remembering.

He lurched slightly as the train began to slide forward, metal screeching. The pistol slipped out of his fingers, onto the floor.

Virtually every seat had a corpse in it, neat or messy, men, women, children. They could have

"He was reproducing like a cell in biology class"

been his neighbors, people he had seen on the platform every morning on his way to work. Some of them, absurdly, still covered their faces with newspaper where they sat or lay, but more than once the newspapers were brown — almost black — with old, dried blood.

One woman in her fifties lay naked in the seat, sideways, her feet drawn up, her body bloated and looking obscenely soft, her face a shrivelled rictus of — what? Pain? Surprise? A hideous all-knowing laughter?

Hello dearie, she seemed to say, not with words, just with her posture and expression and stench. Dearie, I know it all. I've been there. I've seen everything. You can't shock me. So give Mamma a little hug and tell me what's on your mind.

He turned away, covering his face, weeping again, nauseous, Albert Lovell V noting with amazement, *So this is what it's like.*

Damn them —

Yes, Albert. Damn them.

The train was moving steadily now. He made his way from one seat to the other, grabbing the hand-holds one by one to steady himself because it seemed, distinctly, the most horrible possibility of them all, the one thing which would make this unendurable, endlessly real, would be losing his balance and falling into the lap of one of them, those others whom he could still exclude from his life if he tried hard enough.

He was looking for a place to sit, an empty seat.

At the front of the car there was indeed an empty seat, reserved for him, he somehow knew.

No, for someone else. For him. That other.

The last two seats faced each other. The last forward-facing seat was empty. The one opposite, turned back toward the rest of the car, was occupied.

The train accelerated, heaving him forward. He barely caught hold of the back of the empty seat. He sat down.

They must be far beyond the platform now, he told himself. Those people back there, they're all going to be late, alas.

It was almost funny. He took inventory of his various selves, couldn't find them, shouted after them into the empty caverns where they had once been: Wanna laugh? Anybody remember how to laugh?

Don't all answer at once.

Damn you.

Hello, Albert —

He looked around for the speaker. That had been a voice, external, not in his own mind.

'Albert.'

The thing in the reversed seat lurched up, and, suddenly, the knot of his anger just dissolved, and he wasn't angry any more. For a moment he was like a soldier in battle, who has just been hit so hard that the agony of his wound hasn't started to register yet. He can stagger on a few more steps, abstractly aware that he, no, someone else, has been shot. No, it could never happen to him. No, no, not me —

Hello, Albert.'

He recognised Janet, of course, for all that the bullets had blown out both her eyes and carried off the back of her head. He remembered the other reaching over, pointing the gun as she lay still thrashing across the dining room table while blood spouted as if from a broken nose. That other shot out her remaining eye in a split instant, at the very second of already certain death, just out of a sense of symmetry, like the final stroke in a well-drafted blueprint.

The scene replayed in his mind now, and he watched it like a movie, as the flat black-and-white characters screamed and repeated snatches of old arguments and threw things. It was a sordid, badly-written melodrama which had been going on for years, strictly supermarket tabloid stuff — I Chopped My Wife Up And Flushed Her Down The Toilet Piece By Piece — and now, inevitably, it ended, as he opened a drawer, revealing the gun. He did not touch it at first. That was to be her part. He was choreographing the whole thing, every move part of the plan, the other man's plan, a plan of self-defense, not in the legal sense but in his own mind, to justify his actions to himself.

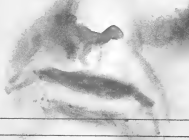
('...daddy-daddy-daddy-don't —')

Sure enough, Janet reached for the gun. He caught her wrist. They wrestled over the table, scattering crystal.

('...daddy...')

That other man had done these things. It was

"He stood right in the middle of the tracks, daring the train to run him down"



too horrible for him, for Albert Lovell to have done. Yes.

He looked around. He thought he saw a figure exactly like himself leaning over the old woman, holding her hand. Another taking his place calmly in the seat behind the dead boy, still another standing in the aisle, clutching the seat-corners on either side in a desperate effort not to faint, yet another still in the doorway, hesitant.

Then they were gone. Somehow he couldn't manufacture an Albert VI. He was alone with... these. It was happening to him now, not someone else.

Damn them all.

To just one other then. Please? The other man who did these things.

'...Daddy?'

He felt a hand touch his knee.

'...Daddy, you hurt Mommy...'

Chrissy, aged four — yes, he could remember that, a checklist of birthdays and doctor's appointments and pre-school classes — her chest caved in, the whole front of her pink T-shirt a red-brown mass like a mud pie — yes, he knew her, that other man's daughter.

'Daddy. You hurt Mommy.'

'No,' he said gently, lifting her onto his lap.

'Daddy. You hurt me.'

'No,' he said again. 'I didn't. He did. He had to. You saw. He wanted to kill his whole life, everything in it, just to finish it all. He even shot the dog and the cat and the goldfish. Everything. Gone. He should have burned the house down too. In the interests of completeness. That's what he wanted. Then he wanted to get on the train and just go, as he had every morning, and ride

out of his world, away from guilt and memory and responsibility, away from everything, and just keep on going. Forever. Do you understand him at last?'

'...no, daddy...'

'I don't either, Chrissy. I don't.'

'You are the biggest goddamn liar —' his wife said, leaning toward him.

'I am the biggest goddamn liar,' he said at last, sighing.

That was enough. He could say, could admit no more than that, weeping freely at last, as all memory of Albert Lovell's Two through Five collapsed into a single, whole man who had just run out of lies.

The train was racing, shaking wildly from side to side, the outside dark now, as if they'd entered a tunnel.

He forced a feeble smile.

'At least we are together again.'

He reached out and took his wife's cold, hard hand in his own. Chrissy clung to his side, sobbing gently.

Wait. Ride. Wait. With the others. He belonged here, with those others. It was complete, the last faint line traced on, the last 'V' crossed, the envelope of his life neatly labelled and sealed and filed away.

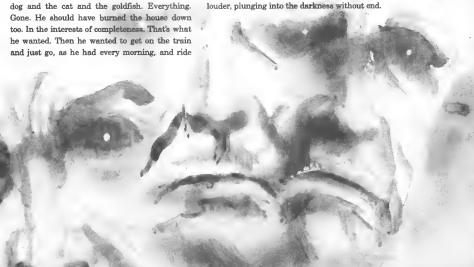
At least we are together.

The train raced on, heaving, shuddering ever more violently; the roar of its motion louder and louder, plunging into the darkness without end.

DARRELL

SCHWEITZER is the author of four books, all of which have strong horrific elements: *The White Isle* and *The Shattered Goddess* (novels), and *We Are All Legends* and *Tom O'Bedlam's Night Out* (collections). His short fiction has appeared in *Twilight Zone Magazine*, *Night Cry*, *Amazing*, *Fantasy Tales* (UK), *The Year's Best Horror Stories*, and elsewhere. He is coeditor of the ravaged *Weird Tales* and of the British edition of *Tales From The Spaceport Bar* (the latter with George Sothern). An upcoming collection of Schweitzer's horror and fantasy is *Transients And Other Strange Travellers*.

"Virtually every seat had a corpse in it, neat or messy, men, women, children"



The Boy with the Moonstone Eyes

By Pauline
Macaulay



Late November in Venice... About the worst month for a visit, as any Venetian would tell you, and guaranteed to keep most tourists away, with the exception of a few eccentrics like myself who enjoy it that way.

I sat in Florian's this particular afternoon, quite alone in one of those charming little rooms, drinking hot chocolate and watching eddies of fog swirl around the Piazza San Marco. It was peaceful and quiet, with just the odd passerby and some desolate pigeons stalked by a mangy cat. Then I saw him. Tall and slender, with a black cape slung around his shoulders, he stood in middle of the piazza, feet apart, head thrown back, looking upwards, towards the *campanile*. He remained like a statue in stone, then the bells sounded, he turned abruptly, cloak flying, and was gone. There had been something mysterious about that lone figure in the piazza, something almost ethereal. But then, someone seen from afar can have a fascination that can soon be lost at close quarters. Nevertheless I hoped he might perhaps enter the cafe, so that I could see for myself, but alas he did not. I finished my chocolate in desultory disappointment and pondered how to spend the rest of the day.

I decided on visit to the Palazzo Grassi, where there was an exhibition of surrealist art. It turned out to be well worth the visit. A couple of hours most enjoyably spent, but now my feet were weary. I returned to the Albergo Danieli, took a hot bath and rested my aching limbs. The fog had cleared somewhat and as I waited for the *vaporetto* I saw the figure again. He was the only passenger in the *traghetto*, crossing the Canale Grande to Ca' Rezzonico. I was sure it was him. He did not sit, but stood, like the *gondoliere*, perfectly balanced, until the boat reached the far bank, where he stepped gracefully ashore and disappeared quickly from view.

The *vaporetto* arrived and left without me. I waited for the *traghetto* to return, paid my two hundred lire and in a few minutes stepped out on the other side. Of course he was far ahead of me by now, wherever he was. The splendid Ca' Rezzonico was closed for restoration so there was no possibility of finding him there. I walked through Campo San Barnaba which was fairly busy with the locals and their children and continued on to Campo Santa Margherita, but there was no sign. On to the port. It had become very cold and the fog, previously filtered by a glimpse of sun, had come down again and the light was fading. Perfectly possible that he was staying in one of the many *pensionesi* in that area. Giving the whole thing up as a pointless exercise, I walked back along the *Fondamenta Zattere* to the church of Santa Maria della Salute, admired

that supreme masterpiece of Venetian haroque for some moments, then, thoroughly foot-sore, I awaited the boat for San Marco.

Later that evening, after an aperitivo and a good dinner, I wondered what had induced such juvenile behaviour on my part. Hardly mid-summer madness in November. I was too old for such larks. In future I would behave with dignity and restraint and not go chasing moonbeams or moon-boys in such an unseemly manner. I selected an armchair in the almost deserted lounge and toyed with the crossword in a two-day-old copy of *The Times*, proudly produced by the porter.

An hour or so later, having eaten much too well, I was in a semi-slumber and thinking about going up to my bed when there was a whirring of the swing-doors and he came in. He was indeed not much more than a boy, twenty-two or three at the most. His face was pinched by the cold and very white but he was certainly handsome. Ebony hair, strong, dark eyebrows and unusual eyes, pale like moonstones. He sat, a chair or so away from me, huddled in his cape.

'Still foggy?' I said. He nodded, blowing lightly on his long, slender fingers. They appeared white and numb and I felt a strong desire to warm them for him.

'You look cold, may I offer you a cognac?' 'Thank you, that is most kind.' I signalled the waiter, ordering for myself also.

There was silence for a moment or two, then I offered him a cigarette. He took one and I lit it for him. In the flames of the lighter I noticed his eyes looked almost opaque.

'Are you staying here... at the Danieli?'

He nodded. He could afford gloves then, and I wondered why he didn't wear them. The cognac arrived and he sniffed appreciatively at the bouquet, wrapping his fingers around the glass.

'So what brings you to Venice this chilly November?' I enquired of him.

'My father brought me here as a child,' he replied.

I wondered perhaps if his father was dead. 'Are you Italian?'

'Let us say I am a European, my ancestry is quite a mixture, a little bit Italian, a little bit Hungarian... with Slav sauce!' He laughed. I noticed his white, attractive teeth.

'And you are an Englishman, are you not?' he ventured.

'Oh, through and through,' I said, smiling. 'One of those Englishmen who holiday at odd

times of the year simply to get away from friends and business acquaintances.'

'What is your business?' he asked.

'I have a factory in the North of England. We make car components.' I thought how dull it sounded.

'You like cars?'

'Less than I did.'

'I prefer horses.' His eyes had a faraway look and I imagined him, like Byron, galloping along the shores of the Lido.

'And what is your occupation?' I asked him. It seemed a long time before he answered. He sipped his brandy. 'Let us say I am a student,' he replied finally. It was an oblique answer and he didn't elaborate further. Rather, he asked me what time it was. I regarded my watch. 'Almost midnight, I'm afraid.'

'Is it?' He put down his glass and rose immediately.

I rose also, 'Time for bed I suppose.'

'For you perhaps,' he said, pulling his cape back on his shoulders. Was he going out again, I mused, at this hour? Well why not? He was young. No doubt he planned to visit a disco, surely more exciting than... but he was holding out his hand. 'Thank you for the cognac. It is an interesting drink.' His hands were still cold, and I confess I did not want to release them.

He looked at my own hand with a strange intentness. 'That is a very beautiful ring you wear on your finger.'

'An old family ring,' I told him.

'What stone is it?'

'A garnet.'

'Ah, yes.'

At that moment I would gladly have given it to him, but of course I did not. No doubt we will see each other at breakfast,' I said to him.

'Perhaps,' he smiled, bowed slightly and turned away from me, into the darkness. I realised too late that I had not asked his name.

Once in bed I found that my tiredness had vanished and sleep was eluding me. The room seemed airless; I decided to open the window. To my surprise the night was clear and pleasant, the fog had cleared and the surface of the lagoon looked calm and limpid in the moonlight. All was quiet and still and I was about to go back to bed when I heard the soft swish of a gondola moving towards the jetty. I could discern the *gondoliere* at the prow and the four dark shapes of his passengers. Men or boys in black capes... or was that my imagination? At the landing-stage one of

"He stood in the middle of the piazzas, feet apart, head thrown back, looking upwards, towards the campanile"

**"His eyes
had a
faraway
look and I
imagined
him, like
Byron,
galloping
along the
shores of
the Lido"**

them alighted. I recognised him at once. He stood still in the moonlight, his cape swaying in the breeze, watching as the gondola moved off again in the direction of San Giorgio, then he turned and made his way towards the Danieli. I closed the window and went back to bed. A strange peace seemed to come over me and I fell, almost immediately, into a dreamless sleep.

It was a disappointment but hardly a surprise that my young friend did not appear at breakfast the following morning. I sat around for a while and then decided to go out. A pale sun greeted me and it was considerably less cold. I took a brisk walk along the Riva degli Schiavoni to the Arsenale, then on to the public gardens where I strolled for a while before retracing my steps to San Marco. It was time for Florian's. I went to my favourite little room and was greeted by the usual waiter, an old timer with an almost aristocratic Venetian face. I ordered my hot chocolate, which arrived with a copy of *Il Gazzettino*. My Italian wasn't really up to that so I gazed out at the piazza wondering if I would see him as I had seen him yesterday, standing in isolated splendour.

I did not. After half an hour and another hot chocolate I gave up and went out. I felt reluctant to leave the piazza and strolled through the arcades gazing at the luxurious shops. I found myself drawn to one particular window full of beautiful hand-stitched gloves and wondered what size his pale hands were and what he would think if I were to buy him a pair. Shaking myself from my reverie, I wended my way back. It was as I did so that I suddenly saw ahead of me that unmistakable black cape going in the direction of the bell-tower. I followed him at once, but the lift doors closed behind him as I reached the loggia. Eventually the lift came down again, and a small group of schoolboys got out, accompanied by a teacher. I was the only one to go up: perhaps I would be fortunate enough to find him alone.

The lift came to a stop and I stepped out into the icy air. Nobody in sight and too cold for the souvenir seller. I walked around slowly in a circle, expecting to find him looking down at the piazza below or at the roof-tops and cupolas of Venice... taking a photograph perhaps. Then, walking around the campanile for the second time, I realised almost with disbelief, that I was totally alone.

He was not there. I looked up the tiny wrought-iron staircase that led up to the belfry,

but the little gate was locked as it should be. He had vanished. I stared down at the piazza, almost in fear that I would see his body lying spreadeagled below me. People were moving like ants, hither and thither, but there was no sign of a disturbance and he would have had to clamber over the wire-meshing to throw himself off. The thought was ridiculous, nevertheless it made me shiver. The silence of a tomb rather than a bell-tower surrounded me, and I decided not to linger. On the way down I asked the lift attendant, in fractured Italian, if he remembered taking up a man in a black cape. He shrugged and said, 'Tanta gente'. But how would he have got out? The gate at the bottom was securely padlocked, a point I confirmed at the exit. I walked slowly across the piazza. Obviously I had made a mistake in thinking he had gone up there in the first place. And yet, I could remember, as from a shot in a movie clearly imprinted on my brain, his black-caped figure bounding lightly up the steps of the loggia. Ah well, the mind can play tricks on the senses of us, but it is always disturbing and I felt a momentary preoccupation with my state of health. In cowardly fashion I made a bee-line for the nearest bar.

Early that evening I left a letter with the porter. 'For the gentleman with the black cape'. I had thought to make some enquiries about him, but in a hotel like the Danieli that would have been considered indiscreet. It was better this way. A simple invitation to dine with me, nine o'clock at the Madonna, a restaurant of good repute near the Rialto. The hall would be in his court and if I were to be snubbed I should not continue to make an ass of myself.

I made a careful toilette. My best grey suit, white silk shirt, light blue tie with matching socks, a silk handkerchief and a discreet splash of vetiver. I regarded myself in the splendid Murano mirror. The silvered old glass reflected a softer image than a new one would have done and although not fooled I left the room with light step. An aperitivo in the bar and then we would see. I was barely halfway through my drink when the porter handed me an envelope. For Mr Nigel Bradley. I opened it with nervous fingers. It was written on the hotel stationery, and the lettering was quite beautiful as if it had been scripted with a quill pen.

Dear Mr Bradley,

Thank you for your invitation.

It is most kind of you.

Michele M.

Michele. I breathed the word softly. So now I knew his name.

I had reserved a corner table at the Madonna and at ten minutes to nine o'clock I was there. It was busy as usual, but my waiter was pleasant. 'You expect a friend. Of course, *signor*. An *aperitivo* while you are waiting?' At half-past nine I took Michele's letter from my pocket and read it again.

He had not actually accepted. I put the letter back in my pocket. At nine forty-five the waiter discreetly placed the menu on my table. Reluctantly I ordered some fish, but I hardly ate it. A carafe of wine later, it was half-past ten. It was plain that he was not coming. Perhaps I should have chosen better, perhaps this popular haunt of Italian businessmen held no appeal for him.

Most of the customers had left and the waiters were getting fidgety. I asked for my bill. My waiter, sympathetic to the lonely diner, helped me on with my overcoat. Then the door opened and he was there, with his black cape, coming towards me. His ebony hair seemed to be touched with silver frost and his eyes looked like milky glass in the white face. He took my hand with icy fingers.

'Please forgive me.' There was no other explanation.

'You are frozen,' I said to him, 'will you eat something?'

He shook his head. 'Thank you, but I could not eat.'

I thought perhaps he was not well. We walked in silence together, over the Rialto and on through the cold, dark streets. When we reached the hotel I asked him if he would care to take a brandy with me upstairs.

'Some friends are arriving by boat', he replied. 'Perhaps I must go with them, but it will not take long.'

'Then I will wait for you', I said, and without shame gave him the number of my room.

Midnight came and went. I tried to read but lacked the concentration. At one a.m. I undressed, put on my pyjamas with my blue silk dressing gown on top, and opening the window, stepped out onto the balcony. The murky waters of the lagoon looked deceptively beautiful, like liquid gold in the moonlight. Nothing stirred, and yet I felt he was somewhere out there. It was too cold to ponder the matter, however, and I returned to my bed. I should have known he would not come. An ageing pederast such as

myself should take a night stroll around the Arsenale and pay for such favours.

Sleep did not come easily and I lay awake while the moonlight streamed in through the window I had left ajar. Did I hear, or did I imagine I heard once again, the swish of a gondola arriving at the jetty? I did not seek to find out however and fell eventually into a restless slumber.

An hour or so later it seemed that I awoke to the sound of someone in my room. I opened my eyes to find him bending over me. 'Michele,' I whispered. I felt his cool fingers on my arm and neck. His moonstone eyes had a feverish glitter. 'Please forgive me,' I heard him say once more... and then his head was on the pillow, his breath on my cheek and I was lost, seemingly for ever, in his embrace.

I awoke the next morning to find that this was all I could remember of the dream; for dream, alas, it must have been, despite the sense of loss I felt when I discovered he was not beside me. I had overslept. Getting out of bed I shaved and dressed hurriedly, anxious not to waste one of my remaining days in Venice.

Once seated in the restaurant for breakfast, I began to wish that I had stayed in my room. I had poor appetite for the delicious croissants and panini. The coffee seemed too strong for my stomach and my head was throbbing. I regretted my over-indulgence of the night before. I requested aspirin which my waiter solicitously brought. 'Scusi, signor,' he said with slight hesitation, 'mi dispiace, but I should tell you perhaps that there is blood on your collar.' So much for my hasty shaving. 'If you will permit me, sir...' the waiter dabbed at my shirt with a napkin dipped in water. 'Grazie,' I said to him, anxious to leave the table. 'Thank you, but I will go and change it.'

I did not encounter Michele all that day, nor did I wish to. I had been foolish enough. I would keep my own company and devote what remained of my time to my beloved Venice. I spent morning and afternoon in churches. They suited my mood of melancholia. In San Giovanni Crisostomo I lit a candle, although I must confess I do not know for whom it was intended. Evening found me excessively tired, however, and I retired to a favourite bar for a quiet drink. It was there I discovered that I had lost the garnet ring.

I returned immediately to the hotel and searched my room, but even as I did so I knew that I would not find it. The ring had been on my finger for almost thirty years and it would have

"I was the only one to go up; perhaps I would be fortunate enough to find him alone"

been almost impossible, even in a moment of aberration, for me to have removed it unknowingly.

I made a perfunctory enquiry at the desk in case the chambermaid had come across it, but she had not and I declined to go to the police. There was a sense of mystery about the whole thing that I could not fathom. Depressed and despondent, I returned to my room and took a bath. I felt listless and unwell and decided to skip dinner and have an early night. I lay down on the bed with a book, but my eyes were heavy and after a few pages I fell into a sound sleep.

It was close to midnight when I opened my eyes. I felt refreshed but far too wide awake. I pulled on my clothes. A short stroll and a stiff drink would be the best thing to induce further sleep. I descended the stairs, ordered a brandy from the night porter, and stepped outside. There was no one about and the lagoon was silent. I walked briskly, inhaling the crisp air until the cold began to reach my bones and I returned for my nightcap. It awaited me in a corner of the deserted lounge together with another old edition of *The Times*. I had barely seated myself when I heard the thump of the swing-doors and the sound of night-revellers. There were four of them, all in black capes, and it was a moment or two before I recognised Michele.

Oblivious to my presence, or so it seemed, they sat down some distance away, laughing and gesticulating and speaking in a language that I could neither understand nor recognise. In any case, I was quite naturally excluded. An old fogey in an armchair, I hid behind my newspaper somehow hoping they would go away. They did not, and although they did not appear to have ordered anything to drink they remained in animated conversation. My drink finished, I rose and made for the staircase. As I drew level I was struck by the resemblance between the four of them. It was as if they were brothers. The same ebony hair and the same moonstone eyes set in white as alabaster faces. I made no attempt to greet Michele but he saw me and immediately jumped to his feet.

'Signor Bradley! How happy I am to see you!' He gestured. 'These are the friends I told you about.'

'Delighted to meet you,' I said somewhat stiffly. They inclined their heads, but they did not smile and it seemed to me that their eyes regarded me strangely.

'Will you join us?' Michele asked me. I shook

my head. 'Thank you, but I must go to bed.'

'To bed?' he laughed. 'But the night has only just begun.'

'For you and your friends perhaps,' I replied. 'No doubt you are about to go dancing.' For some reason his friends seemed to find this remark extraordinarily funny, but Michele regarded me gravely. 'We do not spend all our time in frivolity you know. We are students of Terrestrial Ecology. We go out into the night to study the nocturnal habits of the mammalian order of cheiroptera.'

Cheiroptera? The name was familiar but its exact significance escaped me.

'How very interesting,' I said, preferring not to betray my ignorance, 'but if you will excuse me I will leave you to your studies.'

'As you wish,' Michele said. He clicked his heels together and held out his hand. As I took it a flash of red caught the light on his finger. I stared in amazement. 'But surely... that... that is my garnet ring,' I stammered.

'Of course,' he replied. 'You gave it to me last night, do you not remember?'

Dumfounded, I released his hand.

'Sogni d'oro,' he whispered, and then, giving a slight bow, he turned away from me and returned to the table.

In the seclusion of my room the excitement was so great I found myself shaking. Had the dream been reality? But if I had really given Michele the ring, and it is true that I had wanted to do so, how could one explain such a loss of consciousness? And then I remembered the bell-tower. It seemed that the mind could play even stranger tricks by night than by day. One of the penalties of getting old, I told myself. Feeling calmer, I took off my clothes and got into bed.

I lay with my eyes open and my ears alert for the door, which I had once again left unlocked. It seemed that hours passed before eventually my eyelids became heavy and I closed them. Suddenly I awoke from my slumber... and although I heard no sound I knew that he was in my room.

'Michele?' I murmured. I heard a soft sigh and then he flung off his cape and I saw his white body naked in the moonlight. Was it my imagination that, as he came towards me, the dark shadows of his friends flitted behind him? As he reached my bedside the red glow of my garnet ring flashed on his finger. I felt his cool hands caress my neck and saw the dilated pupils of his moonstone eyes as he bent over me. Then, there was only darkness.

"I felt his cool hands caress my neck and saw the dilated pupils of his moonstone eyes as he bent over me"

It was two days later that they found me, the chambermaid having declined to disturb me the morning before. I was conscious but unable to leave my bed. The blood on my pillow had soaked through to the mattress. Since I had called no one they presumed it was a clumsy attempt at suicide. Transported to the Ospedale al Mare, I was given a blood transfusion. The doctor was aghast at the wounds in my neck but he sewed fine sutures in the savaged skin. He did not know and I did not tell him, for he would never have believed what had really happened to me.

A week passed before I was well enough to travel. 'If you are cautious and take the train, signor,' the doctor had kindly advised me. I sent a cable to my factory and to my housekeeper and returned to the Danieli to collect my bags. No doubt they would welcome my departure. Before I left the hotel however, I enquired of the porter about 'the gentleman with the black cape'. 'He departed some days ago, signor,' he told me.

By evening I was seated in my sleeper on the Orient Express. As it shunted slowly away from the *ferrovia* I knew, with the utmost sadness, that I would never return to Venice.

I had reserved a table for dinner, but it was still early and I settled down to read one of the English newspapers which had been thoughtfully provided. Still tired and listless, I turned the pages perfunctorily; I had little interest in the news items. Then a small paragraph caught my eye. 'Strange happenings on the lagoon of Venice.' I read on. 'The custode of San Michele has reported that there has been vandalism in this island cemetery. Headstones have been removed and graves desecrated. Several coffins have been found empty. A frightened lagoon boatman stated that he had seen figures dancing in the moonlight.'

A strange unease caught my throat. I put my hands to my neck and a speck of blood appeared on my finger. Not wishing to remain alone, I rose and stepped into the corridor. There were few passengers on the train and I saw no one. En route for the dining car, I passed one of the compartments and some movement caught my attention. As the blinds were partially down I could not see their faces. They wore black T-shirts, black jeans and red track-shoes. The pair of hands that shuffled the cards was white as alabaster and there was a garnet ring on one finger.

I stood there transfixed, although my heart was racing. Suddenly the train entered a tun-

nel, the lights dimmed and then went out altogether. I lurched and fell spreadeagled in the corridor. The lights came on again and a passing attendant helped me to my feet and brushed down my clothes. 'Are you all right, signor?'

'Those young men... 'I habbled,' playing cards.'

'What young men, signor?'

'Phantoms?' I laughed wildly, for the compartment was empty and of Michele and his friends there was no sign.

In the dining-car I ordered a brandy. I could not eat dinner, nor did I wish to. Another brandy and eventually I felt strong enough to walk without ignominiously having to ask for assistance.

Once in my sleeper I closed and locked the door with a feeling of relief. A sick old man who needed to lie down, I made my toilette, got into my pyjamas, turned off the light and fell at once into an exhausted sleep. Some few hours later I woke up. There was a quite extraordinary chill in the air and I tucked the blankets closer around me. Moonlight filtered through the window, making strange ethereal shapes. I closed my eyes once more, I had seen enough phantoms. A few moments later a sound made me open them again. The sound of wings. Something flitted above my head and the compartment was full of dark dancing shapes. Then a flash of red flared in front of my eyes. I saw the garnet ring and a cold hand like marble caressed my cheek. 'Michele,' I whispered.

'Yes. Did you really think that I would leave you?' His breath, like cool ice, fanned my cheek. I looked into those opaque moonstone eyes as he pulled the blankets from my shoulders. I was not cold any more but suffused with heat as one with a fever. He took me in his arms and his lips parted.

'Michele,' I whispered. It was the last time I spoke his name.

There was an obituary in *The Times*, of course, and the following paragraph in one of the more lurid dailies.

'Mr Nigel Bradley, managing director of Bradley's Car Components, was found dead from neck injuries on the Orient Express. Foul play is not suspected. Mr Bradley had been in hospital in Venice. An extraordinary suggestion by a student of Terrestrial Ecology who was travelling on the train that the injuries could have been bites consistent with those of the cheiroptera or vampire but was refuted by doctors as 'an absurd fantasy'.

That is why I have told you the real story.

"The doctor was aghast at the wounds in my neck but he sewed fine sutures in the savaged skin"

FEAR

Reviews

OFF THE SHELF

Short story anthologies are big business again after years in the publishing backwaters. David V Barrett takes a look at some top titles.

Short stories have always been a vital part of science fiction; nearly all of today's Big Name Authors started off by selling the odd story to a magazine or, more rarely, an original anthology. In Britain there was a slump for a few years, after *New Worlds* officially folded in 1970. Science Fiction Monthly managed to keep going for a couple of years in the mid-Seventies, but *Vortex* (1977) and *Extr* (1982) both lasted only a handful of issues. Also, in 1982, *Interzone* was born, and has not only survived but done well enough to have plans to go monthly very soon. **FEAR** itself has been taking a lot more fiction lately, and *The Gate*, after a false start a year ago, now looks to be up and running.

The last couple of years have also seen a resurgence of original anthologies such as *Other Edens* and *Zemth*. Which is all good news, at last, for established and new writers. One of the thrills in editing an anthology is wondering whether you're publishing the first story from a future Big Name Author. Alex Stewart was the first new writer published by *Interzone*. His *Arrows Of Eros* (NEL, paperback, £3.50) is a theme anthology conceived over late night drinks at a writers' conference. It is drawn from the rich pool of established British writers and from relative and complete newcomers, and includes fantasy, SF and horror stories all dealing with that terrifying, alien and sometimes fantastic experience: sex.

Arrows Of Eros has a good mix

of raunchy sex, caring love and horror and humour. Stephen Gallagher's *The Horn* is a wonderfully creepy variation on the vanishing hitch-hiker myth, and I'm still squirming at the ending of Iain Banks's *Old Attachments*, in which an alien suffering from unrequited love encounters humans. If you remember Garry Kilworth's *Hogfoot Right And Bird-Hands* in the first *Other Edens*, you'll be delighted as I was to find *The Amorous Adventures Of Hogfoot Right* – a severed foot – here. Tanith Lee's *The Beautiful Biting Machine* shows a previously unsuspected sexual use of an android, while Diana Wynne Jones hilariously rings the changes on group sex in *Mela Worms*. There are 11 more stories, many of them just as good: definitely a good buy.

SWEET SIMAK

The stories in *Arrows Of Eros* are all new, but there's a rich heritage of short stories in SF's past, and it's good to see them still in print. Mandarin, the paperback imprint of Methuen, seems to have cornered the market with vintage Clifford D Simak. Their latest, *The Autumn Land And Other Stories* (£3.50, paperback) is a new collection of old stories, and is quintessentially Simak. There's a warmth, a cosiness, a goodness about Simak's work which in some of his novels gets just a bit too cloying. In these stories, though, Simak's carefulness in telling a good story, his measured, thoughtful tone, makes for a restful read.

Rule 18 and *Gleaners* are neat time travel stories, the first about the sneaky way the Earth football team finally manages to defeat the Mars team after 67

consecutive annual defeats, the second looking at the moral problems faced by an organisation which picks up 'lost' works from the past. *Jackpot* and *Courtesy* are off-planet alien-contact stories about greed and (unsurprisingly) courtesy. *Contraption* is a sweet little tale of how an unhappy farm boy helps some stranded aliens and is repaid with kindness (Simak's aliens always have far more human virtue than humans ever have in his stories). The title story is about a man escaping from the pressures of life into a land which is forever autumn, forever peaceful – but a deadening, deadly trap.

This is a pleasantly readable collection, nicely varied, and a good introduction to the solidly old-fashioned work of Clifford D Simak for anyone who's not read him (in which case, look out for *City as well*). Just don't expect Cyberpunk!

ROLE CALL

Now for a couple of contrasting novels. I've got mixed feelings about Gill Alderman's *The Archivist* (Unwin, £12.95, hardback). It's an intricate, beautifully described story, in a landscape so detailed that at times you can almost breathe the atmosphere. Yet, like many first novels, it feels too self-indulgent, in love with its own sounds; it also has far too many characters (the appendix lists more than 130), with little differentiation between the significant and the insignificant, making it easy to forget who someone is when they reappear a couple of hundred pages on from their last mention.

The Archivist is the story of Cal, a streetwise young man who has managed to survive completely outside the patriarchal officialdom of the City, and of the eponymous Archivist, who sets out to overthrow the rule of women through his access to ancient and hidden knowledge. Both are complex, multi-layered characters, searching for and attempting to fulfil their true identities, and I think if the author had concentrated more

on just one rather than both, she would have ended up with a slightly simpler but more accessible novel. Nevertheless, it's a startling achievement, and I'm looking forward to seeing more from her.

Quite different in style is Mike Resnick's *Ivory* (Legend, £12.95, hardback). I don't know whether he deliberately wrote it as an early-Asimov pastiche, but it comes out that way in places, beautifully done and, of course, far better written, as a good pastiche should be. *Ivory* is a 'fix-up', a novel made up of related short stories linked by a framework. Duncan Rojas, head of research for an encyclopaedia reference work on big game trophies, is asked by the last living Maasai to track down the tusks of the Kilimanjaro Elephant, the greatest tusks ever known, which have special significance to the Maasai.

The novel spans millennia: it's got a Galactic Empire, lots of skullduggery and interstellar pirates, strange aliens, xenophobic, arrogant and greedy humans, boring bureaucrats, and even an Armchair Archaeologist, surely a tribute to Asimov's Lord Dornwin in *Foundation*. It's a great read: nicely humorous, an exciting search, a mystery, reaching an inevitable but moving and noble climax. I'd have liked, though, a more explicit message from Resnick, in a novel all about ivory, that the ivory trade kills elephants – a message that has to be driven home while we still have some elephants left.

RIMRUNNERS

CJ Cherryh is an author whose prodigious output makes it easy to underestimate. A mistake – since she is capable of producing some genuine masterpieces. Her last novel, *Cyten*, was a massive work which took some getting into, but thereafter became much too short. Her exploration of the aza-humans raised by machines and tapes – was a stunning tour de force of politics, science and human relationships. It was set in her familiar, far future Merchants

universe which had previously been best explored in the excellent Hugo-winning *Downlow Station*. In essence Cherryh's vision of the future revolves around various trading blocs in an uneasy state of peace, linked by starships. Hi-tech ecologies are stripped to the bone, with screwdrivers still essential equipment, leaving plenty of room for the human element.



Rime Runners (New English Library, large format paperback £7.95, also available in hardback) is the latest addition to this universe, a comparatively slender 288 pages of relatively large text. Elizabeth Yeager is a space marine who fought with the losing side in a bloody war, and is now stranded on a space station allied to the victors. She fears being hunted down by a turn-of-war starship, but her real reason for wanting to get off the station is simply to be in space. It's a way of life which has got into her blood. To begin with she's suffering the realistically depicted cruelty of apparent kindness by the station people—those spacers not in work get to be first in line for recruitment by the next passing spaceship, with the sad result that Bet is jobless and consequently homeless. Initially her plight is so downbeat as almost to suggest Malamud's classic *The Assistant*. But, in short, order action intervenes and thereafter the plot is fairly predictable.

Eventually lured by the Captain of the starship *Lark*, Bet finds herself befriending Ramsey, nicknamed NDG or (No Damn Good). This lands her in trouble with the evil First Officer. How she fights back against his persecution is fairly familiar stuff. Cherryh embellishes it with some style—Yeager's promiscuity with the mostly all-male crew adds some depth and realism to the former manne, but it lacks the emotional punch it should have. Cherryh is at her best slowly building up the most subtle emotional tangles among more refined people than the crew of a clapped-out old starship. But that's a criticism borne of high expectations after *Cyteen*. There's no doubting that this is a highly readable and involving story. What's more, having a strong central character who's female, evoked by a writer of surpassingly

GOREFIEND'S DELIGHT

HORRORSTORY: THE COLLECTOR'S EDITION VOLUME FIVE

Edited by Karl Edward Wagner
Publisher Underwood Miller Inc.
Format HB, \$40
Category Horror

Few horror anthologies have become so widely regarded as DAW's *Year's Best Horror Stories*. Each volume contains names well known in the genre and several that are likely to become bestsellers at some time in their lives. It may seem surprising that a relatively small US publishing company such as Underwood-Miller is the first to recognise the worth of packaging several DAW Best volumes in one hardcover, but when you realise that the publisher is responsible for some of the best limited edition books in America then that surprise becomes somewhat muted.

Line level-headedness, is always refreshing due to the predominance of male-centred SF. And if it 'proves what women can do' to quote the typically dumb PR blurb, it's also a completely pain-free introduction to Cherryh's Merchants universe—which is quite simply one of the best yet produced by SF.

Stuart Wynne

PORTAL

Following the entry into the world of home computers by Douglas Adams via his computer version of *The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Universe*, we now see the opposite happen with a computer game turned into a book. Based on a cult interactive sci-fi adventure released three years ago by Activision, *Portal* (Grafton, paperback, £3.99) begins with an astronaut arriving back on Earth only to find the planet devoid of human life. Linking up with a worldwide communications system the future's *Odyssey* meets up with Homer, an artificially intelligent computer database which begins to recount the tale of Earth's apparent demise.

Through scene reconstructions and database accessing, author Rob Swigart tells of the discovery of a universe spanning travel system (the *Portal* of the title), the main character Peter Devore's quest for the psychic powers to harness it, and the conflict arising as a result.

It's no mere coincidence that

Volume Five, edited, as ever, by Karl Edward Wagner, a short story writer and novelist criminally ignored by British publishers, contains three Best editions—numbers 13, 14 and 15—totalling 55 stories. Contributors include Robert Bloch, Joe R Lansdale, Brian Lumley, David Schow, Stephen King, Dennis Elchison, Ramsey Campbell, Charles L Grant and Tannis Lee, all of whom are at the height of their powers. The list above gives a varied read, from the darkest and most gruesome horror to the most seductive fantasy.

The book's cover alone, painted by Michael Whelan, makes it a must-have, and the lure of having so many big names tightly packed into such a volume makes it a valuable addition to any collector's bookshelf.

Bob Rabin



the storyteller in *Portal* is called Homer. Swigart makes frequent reference to the classical Greek author's books and there is an underlying classic influence throughout, with the quest for knowledge being at the heart of it all.

Swigart is convincing in his scene setting with a one-state world and its inevitable faws. High technology is cleverly used without going to excess, although when some new hi-tech marvel is introduced the accompanying description/dissection tends to contradict the structure of the book and temporarily slow down the pace of the novel. Thankfully the constant use of remarkably short paragraphs keeps the story flowing around these problems. The progress by Peter and others to the Ant colony, an inevitable attack on the colony and the final realisation of the *Portal*'s powers makes *Portal* a compelling and thoughtful read.

Robin Hogg



SEEING RED

David Schow, the outrageously talented American Splatterpunk may have a lot to complain about after his treatment in the Texas Chainsaw Massacre 3 fiasco, but he should be delighted by the reception from his book of short stories.

Seeing Red (Tor Books, paperback, \$3.95) collates the best of his short stories, both new and old, into one volume. Here we have a grave-robbing twosome who meet an unexpectedly lively corpse in the graveyard living Bunny Didn't Tell Us, a ghostly radio station in *Lovesome Coyote Blues*, a vampire seen in *Night Bloomer*, and a cinema for completists in the acclaimed *Crying Soon To A Theatre Near You*. Schow's style is as novel as his subject matter. He has an incredible turn of phrase and a depth of character insight which I can only compare with that of Stephen King. The characters you meet in each story are unforgettable, yet instantly recognisable. He's included just about every basic human weakness you are likely to encounter in horror fiction, and a few you probably haven't. The story backgrounds also lend strength to the feeling that whatever he describes could be coming soon to a street near you.

At present, short fiction appears to be the area in which Schow works best. His first novel, *The Kill Riff*, shows a gift for longer narrative which will no doubt be developed in his next book *The Shift*. Let's just hope he doesn't leave the short story arena and that a companion to *Seeing Red* will soon appear.

John Gilbert

NEVERNESS

Saving the galaxy and discovering the meaning of life are two of the cosmic questions which underpin David Zindell's impressive first novel, *Neverness* (Grafton, paperback, £3.99). In the end the answers Zindell produces are not great revelations, it's the quest that's the important thing, and this is indeed epic. *Neverness*'s 685 pages are packed with detail, thought and action. When the quest takes us into the company of primitive people a revolting litany of eating habits, and even

the picking of ice, is detailed. The death of a dog kicks off several pages of contemplation on the finality of death, something which resonates through the novel as a whole. And then there are the political intrigues, assassinations, violent misunderstandings with the primitives and civil war.

The setting for the novel is the far future, when Faster-Than-Light travel has been mastered by



the Order of Pilots, to which Malloy Ringess is devoted. The early part of the book details his expertise in meeting the demands of FTL travel with impressive mathematical detail – 'if one covers an n-dimensional cube with finitely many sufficiently small closed sets... But

thankfully these can be skipped over to the meat of the story, which revolves around Ringess and Neverness. The latter is a strange city, a future world owing much to Elizabethan times, with life seeming to revolve around the many pubs and brothels. Ringess's closest friend is Bardo, a Falstaff-like character who lives life to the full. This 'retro-future' is a bit disappointing, although there are some nice ironic touches, such as the banning of 'fones' and all timepieces as these – not aeroclocks – are held to be responsible for the apocalypse which engulfed Earth. Phones and clocks are the demons driving us all to over-consumption and hectic life-styles! More seriously, Zindell subtly includes an obsession about physical contact and gene-lines which reflects a concern over genetic engineering and disease.

As a whole, *Neverness* is a fascinating book overflowing with observation by the first-person narrator, Ringess. Sometimes these can be a bit overstated – 'The hell of war is universally multiplicative. The pain of losing someone you know is a thousand times greater than the deaths of a thousand people unknown'. Shortly thereafter Zindell takes note and turns a galactic war into something more personal, and more involving. But usually Zindell spins his tale with an impressive breadth of thought in this far future

masterpiece. While there isn't anything particularly new here, and characterization isn't amazing – the erstwhile baddie 'surprises' Ringess far too much toward the end with his previously hidden humanity – this is an auspicious debut. An impressive adventure and definitely recommended. Stuart Wynne

STAR TREK: THE LOST YEARS

Despite their treatment as pulp novels, the *Star Trek* books have become the single biggest selling category of genre fiction. It all really started with the publication of Duane Duane's *Spock's World* in hardback and it continues with the hardback release of *The Lost Years* by JM Dillard (Simon and Schuster, £12.95).

The novel is a pre-quel to *The Next Generation* television series, showing what happened to Kirk, Spock and the rest of the Enterprise crew after they landed back on Earth. Surprisingly, Kirk does not want promotion to the Admiralty and it takes all of Admiral Nogura's command skills to turn him on to a job as a diplomatic troubleshooter.

Spock, meanwhile, has to come to terms with his emotions, take a job on another ship or, perhaps, become a novice of Kolmahr mind discipline. His fate is

temporarily sealed when one of the age-old katra of Zakai, an outcast of the Vulcan, now wants to turn the planet back over to the Romulans.

Sailing the shuttlecraft on which a weary Dr McCoy has settled to sleep, the three moves towards the Neutral Zone and a surprise meeting with Romulan high command. The threads of the book tie very neatly together, providing sample chapters in the post mission lives of some of science fiction's most long serving characters.

The Lost Years is only one in a series of these post mission books. Jeanne Dillard's acknowledgements describe two more, *A Flag Full Of Stars* by Brad Ferguson and *The War Virus* by Irenie Kress. Look out for both. John Gilbert

THE SILENT CITY

Sex wars, while sounding like the subject of brainless exploitation movies, have found a place in the hearts of many feminist SF writers. Late Sixties arguments for all true feminists to have nothing to do with men continue to resonate in SF long after their demise in serious feminism. Suzy McKee Charnas wrote probably the most brutal variation on the theme in *Motherlines*, while Joanna Russ provided the best



When it rained, it poured for Christine Ashdown. To solve her murder, her sister had to take on her identity – and her soul...

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CLOSE ENCOUNTERS

MAJESTIC

Author Whitley Strieber
Publisher Macdonald
Format HB, £12.95
Category Science fiction

Although *Majestic* initially appears to be a novel, the author's afterword classifies it as one of those stranger than fiction tales which could be true.

Strieber is renowned for his telling of encounters with alien beings in books such as *Communion* and *Transformation*. He certainly believes that his body, mind and soul have been touched by something unusual, and this third book in the *Communion* trilogy is a logical step forward for him.

It tells of an incident that occurred in New Mexico in 1947 when a strange object crashed-landed near a farming community. At first, the airforce planned to make the discovery of a UFO public knowledge but, when Washington got the word, a dirty tricks campaign headed by Wilfred Stone started, in order to spread disinformation and obliterate other sightings.

As the book begins, Stone is near death and decides to tell a young journalist, Nicholas Duke, about his part in operation Majestic. The plot unfolds and, in true Strieber fashion, becomes more exotic and adventurous as Stone and members of the army are visited by childlike creatures in silver suits. These, we learn later, could be babies, kidnapped shortly after birth and looked after by an alien earth mother – surely a plot worthy of any traditional horror novel.

Yes, we are meant to be scared by the knowledge that these aliens are not easily disposed of little green men, or friendly white dwarves, but that they are more knowledgeable than we about our souls and our futures. It certainly gives you a chill when you think that your understanding of the human body and mind is only fragmentary.

Strieber eventually owns up and, in a fairly simple afterword asserts that some parts of his plot are based on fact. You might believe the author is some kind of nut, but read his words – and by them judge him. I can't say I



believe his vision of the truth, but, after having met him, I wouldn't label him either as a nut or a manipulator out to get as much money as he can. After all, no matter how scared you are that other civilisations might touch our world, most people would just love it to happen, and this book presents just one such scenario.
John Gilbert

and funniest in *The Female Man*. In 1980, Elizabeth Vonarburg's *The Silent City* (The Women's Press, paperback, £4.95) moves the sub-genre on, concerned not so much with winning the war as with stopping the bloodshed.

The context of her story is a post-apocalypse future.

Civilization has retreated to great domed cities whose inhabitants have exceptionally long lives. But the price is sterility, and partly because of this the cities are slowly becoming great archaeological tombs.

Elisa is Paul's genetically engineered child. His aim is to

repopulate the Earth, returning civilisation to the savages outside who suffer short, brutal lives and oppress their women badly enough to start a war between the sexes. We see this world through Elisa's initially naive and childish eyes, bestowing life on the machines which look after her.

But in short order she's in her adolescence, troubled over her feelings towards Paul – his hold over her becoming a scandal.

This, the first part of the book, is practically a novella in its own right, coming to its own dramatic conclusion. The second section has Elisa preoccupied with developing a civilisation handy enough to venture out into the wilderness. She's basically a kind-hearted Dr Frankenstein, the book underscoring the parallels between scientist and parent. In this relationship she has all the power, but strives for a kind of power-sharing with her creations. The constant need to re-evaluate one's beliefs is well argued, with events of the past leading to illogical prejudices which have to be recognised. At the same time the outside world is slowly moving towards bloodshed as a group of women aim for liberation at the point of a sword. It all adds up to an exciting and thought-provoking book which, even if it seems to be two stones rather than one, is well worth buying.
Stuart Wynne

PUZZLES OF THE BLACK WIDOWERS

I first encountered the Black Widowers four years ago when I was on holiday and desperate for something to read. I'd just finished Asimov's initial Foundation trilogy and wanted a change, though I was hooked on the man's style.

It was with some reluctance that I picked up *Casebook Of The Black Widowers*. Having just finished a two year flirtation with Agatha Christie I wasn't ready for more twee detective tales. The afternoon, as I stretched out on the beach with the book, shadowing my face from the sun, provided ample time for an initiation into the club that seeks to see daylight through even the blackest puzzles.

As Asimov says in his introduction to *Puzzles of the Black Widowers* (Doubleday, hardback, £12.95), the real people from whom he took his characters have aged and a few have died. They include the famous genre writers and editors Lester Del Rey, L. Sprague de Camp, Lin Carter and John D. Clark. Each belongs to a real club called The Trap Door Spiders. Unlike the members of that fellowship, however, The Black Widowers have not and will not age. After all, they are but foils for the real substance of the book – the mysteries.

The book contains 13 of those mysteries, each one as tightly written and as enigmatic as the last, but as we're talking about who-or-what-dunnit I won't spoil the fun by relating details. Suffice it to say that my favourite is *Unique Is Where You Find It*; I'm a sucker for stories based on real incidents. Second, in my estimation, is *The Recipe*, the most

UP FOR THE COUNT

DRACULA PRINCE OF MANY FACES

Radu R Florescu and Raymond T McNally
Publisher Little Brown
Format HB, £12.95
Category Non-fiction

Infamous historical figures often find their way into monstrous legend, and that's the case of Dracula, one of the several sons of Dracul, Prince of Wallachia.

Dracula, the real life dictator, bore a few characteristic resemblances to the vampire portrayed in Bram Stoker's horror novel. He was particularly cruel in politics, impaling enemies, nailing the skulls-cups to the heads of political emissaries and pursuing a scorched earth policy in his own land as he retreated before the might of a Turkish army bent on conquest.

The man was ruthless to the core, and by some he was described as a blood-hungry monarchist; but to others, most notably his own people, he was a hero, a lord to be feared but admired. Florescu and McNally's treatise on this prince is a fairly

dry historical document, spiced with many colourful anecdotes describing the tortures Dracula meted out to his enemies.

It is a difficult text to start with, but once you've read the first few chapters and gained the measure of the authors and their subject, you'll be hooked to the end. The combination of character analysis, political comment and, on occasion, engrossing mystery, makes it one of the few so-called learned texts on the subject of the blood prince that I would recommend reading.

The authors have spent a great deal of time perfecting their research and one of them, Florescu, has ancestors who were hounded by Dracula – what better pedigree than that for writing a book about one of the most infamous rulers in Eastern European history?

At the end of the book, however, the authors have to admit that their pursuit of Dracula was hindered at the grave. They can say, without doubt, that he was gruesomely



murdered, but they cannot say for sure where he was buried. It is no doubt this fact that helps to perpetuate the vampire myth, plus the strange events that occur regularly at his supposed grave site.

To find out more, you'll have to read the book. It is a work boned with stark historical fact but it presents some new facts for the Dracula story and, as such, represents a crucial read for 'fans' of the Impaler.
John Gilbert

INSIDE MIDIAN

CLIVE BARKER'S THE NIGHTBREED CHRONICLES

Authors Clive Barker,
Murray Close, Stephen Jones
Publisher Titan Books
Format PB, £5.95
Category Film tie-in

The Chronicles is probably the only major book this year containing fresh fiction from Clive Barker and it's a tie-in to his long-awaited fantasy film *Nightbreed*.

The main section of the book contains well-written potboiled biographies describing many of the creatures you'll see in the movie, from its major stars Boone, Lori, Ashberry and Lylesberg to cameo characters such as Mexico, Frick and Scorch. Every one has an interesting story to tell and all are gloriously illustrated in full-

colour, full-page photographs posed as only stills photographer Murray Close knows how. It's about time his work found its way onto more than film company publicity handouts and this book is truly a tribute to the man's cinematic eye.

Biographical text is further embellished with rather primitive drawings which give a flavour of the raw fantasy that the film portrays.

Finally, in the last third of the book, Stephen Jones, who acted as unit publicist on *Nightbreed*, describes the work of special effects maestros Image Animation who truly made the underworld society of Midian come alive.

The Chronicles book is available



through specialist outlets now and will be republished when the film has its UK release in September. I recommend you buy now, though, as you don't need to see the film to understand the book; in fact the reverse might be true.

A superb quality recommendation read for all Barker fans.

John Gilbert

THE * NEW FORCE



subtle of locked-room mysteries, and third is *The Four Leaf Clover* which has a deceptively simple entré.

All, however, are worthy of the Black Widowers and I suggest you seek mutation immediately.

Mark Westerley

STARFIELD

Despite one glaring omission, this anthology of stories by Scottish science fiction writers shows that England and America can't claim all the talent for themselves.

There are 17 authors involved in this project, most of whom are little known, yet for the most part are good writers all the same.

The most well known are Archie Roy, who contributes a short historical piece called *King Of England I Will Die*, Chris Boyce, who provides a slightly longer story set at sea, Edwin Morgan



who offers a series of *Particle Poems*, and Donald McIntosh whose *For Some Dark Purpose* I found an intriguing treasure in this anthology.

All the stories have strong Celtic roots either in style or content, though some of them make you hope you never pass within a thousand miles of the Scottish coastline. But each is

meant to act as a spur to other Scottish writers who, presumably, would like to come out of the woodwork but lack the nerve for publication.

The one voice missing from this Scottish missive is that of Iain Banks, who is one of the masters of SF. No doubt he was too busy to contribute, but his absence is noticeable in a book particularly associated with the thistle.

Mark Westerley

SKIN OF THE SOUL

This collection of seventeen new horror stories by women (Women's Press, paperback £4.50), edited by author Lisa Tuttle, is a thought-provoking anthology of tales in what the Press describes as 'a newly fashionable genre'.

The authors' biographical notes at the end of the book seem to indicate that all write from a feminist/post-feminist perspective, but this does not mean that the way in which many of these stories successfully address taboos and terrifying issues will not be of interest to a male audience as well.

Pick of the bunch are Melanie Tem's *Lightning Red* which deals with woman's compulsion to take on the pain of others, Suzy McKee Charnas' *Boots*, a well-paced and satisfying horror fantasy about an adolescent girl's revenge on her schoolboy tormentor, and Karen Joy Fowler's haunting and subtle *The Night Wolf* about suppressed memories of terrible events. Also of note are Terry McGarry's *Louise*, the story of a woman's struggle to come to terms with her own identity and, in a similar vein, Melissa Mia Hall's *Listening*. Tuttle's own *Mr Elphinstone's Hands* is a truly weird and convincing amalgam of spiritualism with the terrors of rejection and incarceration.

Many of the stories in *Skin of the Soul* provide a frisson of recognition and, with a few disappointments aside, the book achieves the goals set out by Tuttle in her introduction and gives women writers the

opportunity to explore the same 'dangerous freedoms' which are afforded to their male counterparts by the horror genre. Patience Coster

EVERYONE'S NIGHTMARE

THE BAD PLACE

Author Dean R Koontz
Publisher Headline
Format HB, £12.95
Category Thriller

Despite the seemingly formulaic approach Koontz has to his novels, making a locked-room type of mystery and then springing surprise after surprise for its solution, you can give me more of this man's fiction any time.

His latest novel, bound for supersellerdom no doubt, begins as Frank Pollard awakes to everyone's nightmare: alone and forgetful of all but his name. Furthermore, after a solid night's sleep, he wakes to find his clothes dirty and various odd objects in his hands.

He eventually hires husband and wife investigators Bobby and Julie Dakota, to whom we are introduced in a hail of bullets as they try to scupper the plans of a computer software thief. The incident, naturally, leaves them worried about each other's future safety and, only after much soul-searching do they decide to help Pollard.

It is, however, Julie's Down's syndrome brother, Thomas who coins the title of the book. *The Bad Place* can mean death or somewhere even more terrifying. The creature that visits him in his



room certainly comes from a bad place, but it's not your ordinary type of ghoul or vampire. It is related to Frank Pollard and has come to take him home.

The Bad Place swings along like the last Koontz bestseller, *Midnight*, but contains a mystery more in keeping with *Strangers*. The amalgam works efficiently and quietly, unrelenting in its purpose to thrill, challenge and charm. It is without doubt one of the new breed of mystery thrillers that has thrown off the quaint mantle of the old masters and shown that material can be handled with such explosive panache that you don't need explicit sex or violence to keep a reader's interest. John Gilbert

GRAPHIC

Warren Lapworth begins a quest through comics and graphic novels . . .

It'll open on a nice, safe topic: necrophilia. The second volume of DC's two-part graphic novel, *Deathman* (£2.50, import) begins with a resume of the hero's past. Boston, a circus performer, was shot dead, as predicted by a fortune teller, and now 'exists' as a ghost in love with a restless spirit. To free her, he's taken over a human body to bring her killer to justice.

With help and hindrance from his ghostly lover and the wife of his adopted body, Boston shows that it's not even easy being dead. The story's a little garbled in places, but obviously would have been clearer if I'd read part one (naughty me). The art is excellent, carefully inked and tastefully coloured. An unusual and intriguing, if sometimes random, tale.

THE RAVEN

Don't bother scanning Classics Illustrated - The Raven and Other Poems (£2.25, import). I found the cross-hatch shading, posed colours and bulbous forms drawn by Gahan Wilson way too calm and storybook to illustrate Edgar Allan Poe's poems. Classics Illustrated is one for the kids or for Poe addicts who'll digest his work in any form.

DARK HORSE PRESENTS

Staying with the stomach-bursting monsters, Dark Horse Presents Issue 34 (£1.10, import) features a self-contained but open-ended Alien story of morals and irony. It also includes *Zent*, a simple rescue adventure with continental art, and part five of *Race of Scorpions*, a sketchy, historically inspired battle. With issue 35 featuring *Predator*, Dark Horse Presents is certainly one to watch.

ROBOCOP

A little short on death but packed with violence, *RoboCop* (56p, import) is Marvel's first movie-inspired comic series since the late, unlamented *A Night on Elm Street*. It's full colour, standard size, has greater public appeal than *Nightmare*'s b/w magazine, but is unlikely to find favour with fans of OCP's infamous creation. Although clearly drawn and reasonably authentic, issue one's art and plot lack the appropriate gritty nature.

BATMAN

And now to the ubiquitous Batman. Titan's *Year Two* reprints *Detective Comics* 575-578, where The Batman teams up with Joe Chill, the man who killed his parents, to defeat The Reaper, a skull-faced killer armed with twin sickles who was Gotham's vigilante before The Batman. Art varies from the distinct style of Davis and Neary (my favourite pencil-in team) to the scruffy and decidedly off last part, pencilled and inked by Todd McFarlane, an artist I loathe but whom other, tasteless people love. Whatever the visuals, Mike Barr's story is mediocre and slow - at times I was very tempted to stop reading.

Not so with *The Joker's Revenge* (Titan, £5.95), a selection of five Batman stories from the late-Sixties/early-Seventies involving Two-Face, Superman, the Anti-Batman Squad, an alien from the Sirius system and of course The Joker, although only in 'chapter' five. The stories are contrived, patronising but fun, and light artwork fits the inoffensive adventures.

And in *Detective Comics* 611 (50p) The Batman has to stop The Penguin from raiding Gotham City's bank. Presumed dead until now, The Penguin's aided but mostly hindered by Kadever, who can control the fat waddler by post-hypnotic suggestion. Middle-of-the-road art, fatuous story. Steer clear.



ETA



MAN-ELF

More respectful to the original author, Talent's *The Saga of the Man-Elf* (£1.10) has the hero, an elf (of course) called Janus, leading the rescue of Moorcock's Unseen from a castle held by the post-Third War rulers of Scotland. Artwork is short on detail and faces are samey, but it's mildly entertaining and, when complete, should be a reasonable five-part adventure.

ALIENS

Still at the movies and in the future, Titan have released Dark Horse's *Aliens* mini-series as a collective graphic novel for £6.95. Ten years on from the movie, the aliens are still around but are in demand as biological weapons. Hicks, surviving marine from the film, leads an exploration to the aliens' home, with an older but disturbed Newt tagging along, while on Earth an infected pilot still lives.

Although black and white, the artwork for *Aliens* is far better than most graphic novels. Mark Nelson's deft shading and precise form creating an oppressive, futuristic atmosphere. He is at an advantage working from Mark Verheiden's great storyline, with sub-plots, dreamscapes, flashbacks and reports integrating into an absorbing, fast-paced adventure that you'll find difficult to put down. An essential purchase.

SPIDER-MAN

Just a quick mention for the latest two issues of *Spectacular Spider-Man*, in which the webhead takes on the Hobgoblin and Carnion. It's pretty simple stuff but full of over-the-top drama; 'fun comic of the month'.

WOLVERINE

Marvel cult hero Wolverine (who makes Batman look like Andy Pandey) is up to his usual tricks. Issue 23 (50p) concludes the adamantium-clawed ryma's Spanish adventure. Roughhouse, La Bradora and Salvation helping him battle with decrepit cyborg G. 1st and Cordad, mutated into the amorphous, all-consuming Spore by his own tainted 'super-soldier' cocaine. John Byrne always seems to rush his Wolverine art, the inking is often scuffy, with over-vague pencils, far short of his brilliant best. He hasn't been helped by Archie Goodwin's plot. Spore's origin making it near-impossible for the creature not to look ridiculous. Then, after all the build up, Spore is dispatched with quite remarkable ease. Disappointing.

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SUPERHEROES GO GREEN

Indiana Jones teams up with Superman to save the world from itself, Frankenhooker is bought by Medusa, and Spielberg's latest movie is shot down – which goes to show that you can't always be a whizz-kid. John Glenday, our man in the spot, has the latest.

The Maniac Cop is back! Medusa Pictures will release the sequel sometime in 1991 and have managed to bring back the entire film crew from the original movie, which proved to be one of their best video rentals in 1989.

The ending of the original was disappointing, consigning the killer cop Robert Zdar to a watery grave, but this time round they have bolstered the cast with the excellent Bond villain, Robert Davi. Bill Lustig again directs a Larry Cohen script, and Bruce Campbell returns to hunt the bad guy down.

Medusa are definitely a company to watch in 1990. Their release schedule includes both of Frank Henenlotter's new films. August sees the video release of *Basket Case 2*, with the brothers from number one alive and well but imprisoned on an island of freaks. Then in December *Frankenhooker* is released. Medusa's catalogue also contains the long awaited *Bride Of The Re-Animator* (October), *Martians* (November), and *Amityville 4* in April (watch out for interview with director Sendor Stern coming soon in **FEAR**).

In the US, Steven Spielberg's new film *Always* has done less than spectacular business. The story of a dead pilot (Richard Dreyfuss in his third Spielberg movie) returning as a ghost to kindle a romance between his girlfriend and a younger pilot has received generally favourable reviews but its theme lacks audience drawing power.

Part of the problem is that audiences today have preconceived ideas of what to expect from a Spielberg movie, and when they pay their six bucks they want to see a man in a hat blowing away Nazis/sharks, or get a cosmic buzz when the ETs come to their neighbourhood theatre. If they

want romance, they can watch *When Harry Met Sally*, and laugh at the same time.

It appears that Mr Spielberg has typecast himself, and no matter how good a film he makes, if it doesn't have the above qualities, he can expect a hard time at the box office in the US. However, I expect *Always* will do very well in the UK

because of our good taste, and Mr S will get the recognition he deserves. Cruel world, though.

By the time you read this column you will probably have heard about the *Friends Of The Earth* movie called *A Small Step*. Harrison Ford has agreed to play Indiana Jones in the ecologically themed movie, alongside Christopher Reeve reprising his Superman role. Other stars involved include Steve Martin, Rosanna Arquette, John Malkovich and Grete Scaachi.

Terry Gilliam is to direct one of the several stories that will make up the one million dollar film, and *Friends* are hoping that many more stars will



TROUBLE AT TROMAVILLE

Lloyd Kaufman and Michael Herz have a lot to answer for. They have dual handedly turned the low budget spoof film into an art form and for their troubles are about to be rewarded, as Virgin release old favourites *Rabid Grannies*, *Toxic Avenger 2* and *Troma's War* onto video.

You could say that *Troma* films are important social documents describing the dangers of nuclear waste and prescribing social values for all our kids. But that's a load of bull. As you'll see when you view these movies, they're all about entertainment at its sleaziest...

make *Rabid Grannies* a film to be remembered.

TROMA'S WAR

A cross between *Apocalypse Now*, *Police Patrol* and a Lill Garrett movie (there must be a skateboard in there somewhere), *Troma's War* takes the whole of America into armed conflict.

A plane crashes on its way to the tropics, dumping the survivors in the vicinity of a group of international terrorists who want to invade the US. Another handful of unknown actors and actresses do battle with directors Michael Herz and Samuel Weil to get the best lines while the rest of the crew screw it up fighting for their lives against heavily armed mercenaries.

The resulting mayhem is

indescribable, throwing up what Troma describes as some new kinds of heroes. There's the gargantuan junk-food gourmand, the gritty used-car hockmaster, the hunksome environmentalist, the herniated 70-year-old housewife, and there are lots of 'sensational women!'

It sure sounds like fun, indeed it looks like fun, but then (yet again) that's what Troma is all about.

THE TOXIC AVENGER PART 2

You may remember that old Toxie, the superhero with the radioactive undies, was once an irksome little squirt bowled into a can of really rad garbage. After disposing of the baddies who made his life a pain he discovers that the *Tromatons* (?) in his body act up whenever evil is – a bit like rumbugo, really – and as a result he must destroy the baddies or suffer the physical consequences.

When, in Part Two, the evil Apocalypse Inc blow up his

RABID GRANNIES

Two little old ladies invite their relatives to a beautiful, big house for the weekend. You immediately realise that the only reason these folks are going to visit their dear dotty almost departed is for the huge stack of loot that could be there's if they sack the right parts and say, 'Open Sesame' at just the right moment.

However... in steps the wronged brother (who happens to be a transvestite) to deliver his own present: a box which the old ladies open only to release a deadly gas which turns them into slavering monsters.

It's bye-bye family as brother dear gets his revenge and director Emmanuel Kervyn steps up the tension (and over the growing number of bodies). The camerawork is hokey and the acting atrocious, but the combined effects of cast and crew



Troma's War

You Have The Right
To Remain Silent...
...Forever.

SLAYER



donate their services.

Gremlins 2 bears the subtitle *The New Batch* in its US production campaign and offers glimpses of gremlins to expect. We already know about the bat-gremlin, but also featured will be a spider-gremlin and a dentist-gremlin, rampant with killer drill! Although the story is set in the big city, there is one scene that harks back to the original, with the bad gremlins taking over a bar and wreaking havoc. This time they take over a yuppie bar with, no doubt, many satirical jabs at *Filofaxes*, portable phones and all. This is the kind of humour at which Joe Dante excels.

Expect to see *Conan 3*, as Arnie has yet to complete his three picture contract with Dino De Laurentiis. Sources name it as *The Ultimate Warrior*.

Fly 2 director Chris Walas has moved back into the FX field to provide the afflictions for Tim Burton's characters in *Edward*

sweetheart's home for the blind in order to build a chemical plant, he kills all their bouncers and forces the organisation into an even more diabolical plot.

They lure him to Japan with the hope that his father may be over there, but as soon as he arrives they try to neutralise his *Troma* ions. He's not about to bite

that bullet and, once he realises his father is a drugs smuggler, he gets back on Inc's case.

Toxic 2 is an intoxicating follow-up to a cult classic and, with *Toxic Avenger 3: The Last Temptation Of Toxic* about to hit Britain this year, *Troma* is certainly making it's presence felt on this fair Isle.

John Gilbert



Toxic Avenger 2



Rabid Grannies

VIDEO VIBES

grave again in *Prom Night 3: The Last Kiss* and, finally, other comic characters likely to appear on the big screen this year include *The Fantastic Four* (with the Silver Surfer), *Iron Man* and *Greenburg The Vampire*.

Scissorhands.

Other news this month is that Jenny Agutter is returning to the horror genre and has signed to appear in *Child's Play 2* alongside *Bad The Chud* star Gerrit Graham.

Mary Lou returns from the

TALES FROM THE CRYPT

Distributor CIC
Cert 18, 90 mins
Rental

Originally broadcast on American television, three episodes from this successful series have now been compiled as a film.

Each story is culled from the cult *Fifties* comic books *Tales From The Crypt* or *House Of Fear*, published by the infamous EC Comics before they were banned under the US Comics Code. Universal have put a lot of money into these productions and pulled

the death penalty is suddenly reinstated and he's on his way to that easy chair.

No sooner have you recovered from that jolt than the ancient *Crypt Keeper* introduces a quaint tale of a family Christmas with mother and father downstairs by the fire and daughter upstairs waiting for Santa. Quaint that is until unfaithful widley gives husband a poker through the skull. As she's disposing of the body a radio announcer warns listeners to be on the look out for an axe-wielding loony dressed as Father Christmas who's been killing women in the neighbourhood.

Enter axe-wielding loony in the guise of LA Lou's Larry Drake.



Tales From The Crypt

some big name producers and directors.

The stories also work as a movie, linked as they are by the *Crypt Keeper*, a mummified host brilliantly crafted by effects doyen Kevin Yagher, also responsible for *Child's Play* and the *A Nightmare On Elm Street* movies.

The producers/directors include Richard (*The Last Boys*) Donner, Walter (*Aliens*) Hill and Robert (*Back To The Future*) Zemeckis - what better team could you have? The stories aren't half bad either, each having different tones that range from scary to darkly funny, and all have twist endings.

The Man Who Was Death stars Bill Sadler as executioner Niles Talbot. He favours the electric chair but, when state legislature drops the death penalty, Niles decides to go in for a little summary justice, frying a biker who escaped trial on a technicality and a cheating wife and her lover who were found not guilty. He also almost kills a disco dancer but is caught in the act by the cops. He's found guilty of first degree murder and (what a coincidence!)

Wile knocks out this sicko Santa, then decides to hatchet her husband and blame the loony. Santa's not done though and, with the help of the little daughter, he enters the house.

The third and final story, *Dig That Cat*, confronts death head-on as Ulric The Magnificent tells the tale of how a mad scientist implanted a cat's nine lives into his brain. Now he makes his living by dying and being resurrected.

Each story will appeal to different types of viewer. *The Man Who Was Death* is a quiet tale with an ironic ending in the true EC tradition, while *All Through The House* is about as unstable a slasher flick as you can get. *Dig That Cat* is, however, my favourite as it ties up the deeply unpleasant with the hysterically distasteful.

The 90 minute collection is all too short and represents my kind of anthology. It sticks close to the visual traditions of EC comics, uses original storylines and hot cinematic talent. Fans will also be pleased to note that another three-story anthology is on the way, hopefully before next year.

John Gilbert

Collectables

FEAR takes a look at some recent video releases on sell-thru - all priced at £9.99 each.



The Legacy (Odyssey, 18) tells the story of Maggie (Katharine Ross) and Pete (Sam Elliott) an American couple who journey to England for Maggie's work. Following an accident with their motorbike they end up in the mansion of a strange old multimillionaire whose other guests have achieved power and money with the help of their host's supernatural powers. But the rich old guy is dying and Maggie is earmarked to take over. Reasonable thriller with good performances from Ross and Elliott.

ROCKY HORROR ROCKS ON

Four titles in the CBS/FOX Cult collection.

Shock Treatment (PG) is Richard O'Brian's follow up to his Rocky



Horror Picture Show Poor old Brad and Janet are dragged onto a marriage counselling TV show. Brad ends up in the psychiatric ward while Janet is groomed for TV stardom in a town obsessed by TV game shows. Some good songs, bizarre costumes and a 'message' O'Brian stars alongside Barry Humphries and Charles Gray. Good entertainment.



Although not one hundred per cent **FEAR** material, **Myra Breckinridge** (18) is definitely a cult classic with a huge element of fantasy. Myron Breckinridge has a sex change and becomes Myra (Raquel Welch) who wants fame and fortune. So it's off to the drama school in Hollywood owned by her rich uncle (John Huston) where Myra ends up all-powerful. Great performance's all round and a wonderful cameo from the legendary Mae West in this hilarious satire on Tinseltown, adapted from Gore Vidal's novel.



Janet and Brad - in for some Shock Treatment



The Legacy: Katharine Ross

Sex Kittens Go To College (15): Down at Collins college 'thunko' the electronic brain hires Dr Mathilda West to head up the science dept and hold sexual sway over just about everyone. Desperately dated (1960) black and white movie, 'a sci-fi comedy classic' say CBS. It ain't.

Nosferatu The Vampire (18) from German director Werner Herzog and starring Klaus Kinski as Count Drach-koo-la. I think we all know the story of this one, although I've never seen it so beautifully filmed before. Though over long, and unintentionally funny at times, **Nosferatu** is an essential buy for any true Drach-koo-la fan.

STALK AND SLASH

Three titles from Virgin. First up is **Dressed To Kill** (18) directed by Brian De Palma and starring Michael Caine and Angie Dickinson. Stalk and slash, sex and violence, pretentious and boring.

Next, **The Step-Father** (18). Jerry's bumped off one family, so he finds a nice young widow and



daughter and thinks that now he has found his ideal. Or has he? Excellent thriller with some very nasty moments. Good acting all round, especially from Terry O'Quinn as the eponymous step-



"A REMARKABLY GRIPPING PICTURE... FULL OF TENSION AND SUSPENSE"



Myra and Myron

father
 Lastly *Class Of Nuke 'Em High* (18): Tromaville's nuclear power plant has leaked into the high school next door and some ponce teenagers are in trouble, mutating into sex crazed, bloodthirsty beasts. There are lots of laughs and some great over-the-top effects in this hoot of a movie.



THE NEW MAN

From Parkfield comes *Making Mr Right* (15) directed by Susan Seidelman: Identical in every way to his creator, Ulysses the android (John Malkovich) is designed to survive in space. But like his maker, Ulysses is not perfect, so top PR consultant Frankie Stone (Ann Magnuson) is brought in to improve his public image, but love pops up and the fun begins. A very entertaining and lighthearted movie.
 David Western



COMIC BOOK CONFIDENTIAL

Director Ron Mann
 Distributor Castle Hendring
 Cert 15, 85 mins

We've never had it so good. That's the message delivered in the first few minutes of this documentary charting the history of the comic book through the pre-war funnies to the post war EC comic era, the initiation of the strict code of ethics, and the creation of brand new superheroes.

First, though, we're shown how some dangerous old fogies portrayed comics just after the war. They were shown as morally degenerate, illiterate and corrupting materials. In one black and white clip an announcer

describes just what he did as a child while the boys in the picture lounge around and read comics.

That said, the documentary shows a wide variety of styles and content. Robert Crumb talks about the American underground comics, while William Gaines describes the rise of MAD. Will Eisner waxes lyrical about *The Spirit*, and Jack Kirby, Stan Lee and Frank Miller talk about today's costume clad go-getters.

It is a pity that Britain's comic book talent is so wilfully ignored in this treatise. After all, the likes of Alan Moore, David Lloyd, Dave McKean, Alan Grant, Grant Morrison and Neil Gaiman are now the biggest names in American comicdom - and they're all from the good 'ol UK. Still, you can't have everything, and this is a fast paced, colourful and evocative documentary featuring many comic book favourites and the faces behind them.

John Gilbert

THE SECRET IDENTITY OF JACK THE RIPPER

Hosted by Peter Ustinov
 Featuring Jan Leeming
 Distributor Castle Hendring
 Cert 18, 90 mins

From the moment the Ripper sinks his knife into his first victim, you know that this heavily hyped docu-drama is a cast off from American television.

Hosted by the indomitable Peter Ustinov it presents the evidence at tedious length and provides a few reasonably acted though slightly stereotypical cameos (in which the killer constantly outwits the police) to break up the boredom.

Even the writer and director must have guessed that 90 minutes of evasive talk and general evaluation, would eventually get viewers right in the gizzard so, in the best tradition of soap opera, they wheel on a subplot, this time in the guise of ex-news reader Jan Leeming who talks to various experts and looks in awe at the British Library archives.

Unfortunately I've never been a great fan of American-style television networking, though it enables me to spot just where the programme should have been cut for a commercial break, i.e. each time a segment from an acted murder sequence is repeated. This wouldn't be so bad if, in order to pad out this programme, they hadn't repeated such sequences ad infinitum.

The final insult for Ripper watchers, intent on seeing 'respected forensic scientists and criminologists' attempting to solve the mystery, is the ridiculous panel exposed at the end. Each member of said panel is asked to disclose who they thought was Jack The Ripper. They all come to more or less the

same conclusion, but they are hardly groundbreaking revelations. Even the FBI's psychological portrait of the killer has all the generality of a palmistry reading.

This Jack programme, though interesting at first, provides yet more ammunition for those who feel it is pointless to speculate on the Ripper's crimes, committed more than 100 years ago. Certainly, on the evidence it portrays, I'd rather watch David Wickes' ineffectual television drama a dozen times than this piece of pointless US puffery.
 John Gilbert



HOLY BATMANIA!

Released to cash in on the current Batman craze, this 47 min programme from K-tel purports to trace the history of Batman from comics through TV to last year's Michael Keaton blockbuster, but focuses all its running time on the 60s Adam West TV series: Clips galore, American whacky commentary plus interviews with the aged protagonists and a price tag of £9.99 make this one for very dedicated Batman fans.

Oliver Frey



LOFTY IDEALS

HIDER IN THE HOUSE

Starring: Gary Bussey, Mimi Rogers
Director: Matthew Patrick
Distributor: Vestron Pictures
Cert 18, 105 mins
Rental

As a boy Tom is mercilessly abused by his parents. One day he cracks under the strain and burns down the house together with nasty mom and dad. After years in psychiatric hospital he is deemed fit to join the outside world. On a stroll around the suburbs, Tom (Gary Bussey) spots a large family house, just completed and awaiting the loving family he so longs to be a part of. Gaining access, Tom builds himself a hideaway in the loft and takes up residence.

The seemingly happy Dryer family - plus pooch - move in, but the dog is soon dispatched by



Tom for nosing around in the loft, so is the man who comes to fumigate the loft for rats.

After a bust-up over another woman Susan (Mimi Rogers) throws her husband out, and it's time for Tom to step in as the friendly neighbour.

Hider in the House is a good thriller, though at times it seems to feel a little drawn out. But it's nice to see a main character and anti-hero for whom one has a measure of sympathy.
David Western

informs Sarah that she is pregnant, and Sarah now decides to lay her ghosts once and for all for the sake of Austin and the baby. But does she have the power to do so, or will evil forces drive her to the same fate as her mother?

Released in December 1989, this Jerry London produced/directed version of a Jim Flanagan novel is a reasonably gripping suspense movie cum ghost story which owes more than a little to its venerable antecedents *Gaslight*, *Suspicion* and *Rebecca* (it even contains an exceedingly shifty housekeeper à la Mrs Danvers), though it cannot compare with any of them in terms of style and flair. However, despite generally superficial characterisation, occasional implausibilities of plot and at times creaky acting, London's direction is careful and competent and the narrative cracks along quite successfully to its unexpected conclusion.
Patience Coster

JACK'S BACK

Starring: James Spader, Cynthia Gibb
Director: Rowdy Herrington
Distributor: CBS/Fox
Cert 18, 92 mins
Rental

'Oh no, not another Jack The Ripper movie!' I thought when this arrived for review, but how wrong I was.

It's LA 1987 and Ripper copycat killings are in full swing: same dates, same times, just one hundred years on and, as the movie opens, there's one more killing to go before history finally repeats itself.



The Haunting of Sarah Hardy

Jedged creature. Is it friendly? Priscilla Barnes, seemingly in a constant daze, thinks so. Her boss, Bradford Dillman in usual dastardly form, disapproves. But the Lords of the Deep are unstoppable in their aim to teach ozone destroying humanity a lesson.

Competently produced with a light smattering of special effects, this should keep the family quiet on a wet

afternoon, while not exactly shredding any nerves.
Oliver Frey

THE HAUNTING OF SARAH HARDY

Starring: Sela Ward, Michael Woods, Roscoe Born, Polly Bergen, Morgan Fairchild
Director: Jerry London
Distributor: CIC Video
International
Cert 18, 100 mins
Rental

Fifteen years after the suicide of her jealous and mentally unstable mother, the wealthy heiress Sarah Hardy returns to the family home with her new husband, Austin. There she begins to feel the malevolent presence of her mother's spirit and becomes convinced that the dead woman is returning to claim the house for herself and get rid of Sarah - for good. Sarah confides in her childhood friends Lucy and Alan, the latter of whom is now her doctor and in love with her. Shortly afterwards, Alan



Young medical student Martin (James Spader) believes that he has stumbled across the killer - a fellow student - when he discovers the body of a young prostitute in her flat. Pursued by the 'killer' to the clinic where they both work, things turn very nasty for Martin.

At this point the first unexpected plot twist happens. Soon after which the police

LORDS OF THE DEEP

Starring: Bradford Dillman, Priscilla Barnes
Director: Mary Ann Fisher
Distributor: MGM/UA
Cert PG, 75 mins
Rental

Always quick off the mark, Roger Corman produced this Abyss clone on a shoestring to ride the wave of advance publicity of the real thing, and I wouldn't be surprised if *Lords* hasn't made more profit.

The crew of an underwater lab is trapped 10,000 feet down by an earthquake. Communication is cut, and soon a glutinous blob from a broken sample jar begins to wreak havoc. People disappear, people die while the jelly transforms itself into a fully



Lords Of The Deep

believe they have the case sewn up. Not so – as there are a few more twists yet to come.

Jack's Back is a very neat thriller, with a few surprising plot angles. Full marks go to Rowdy Herrington for his script and direction.

David Western

ERIK THE VIKING

Starring: Terry Jones, John Cleese, Tim Robbins, Eartha Kitt, John Gordon Sinclair, Mickey Rooney, Imogen Stubbs, Anthony Sher
Director: Terry Jones
Distributor: CBS/Fox Video
Cert 15, 89 mins
Rental

It is the Age of Ragnarok, where the sun never shines and Viking hordes roam the land, raving and pillaging for all they are worth. But when Erik – a



Erik The Viking

young and unusually sensitive Viking warrior – inadvertently kills the woman he is trying to save from a fate worse than death, he decides to try and bring the evil Age to an end. Together with a motley crew of village men, Erik embarks upon a sea voyage to the edge of the world in order to wake the slumbering gods and bring the sun back to his dark land.

The most striking elements of Terry Jones' fantasy/comedy adventure (trimmed by nearly

twenty minutes for its video release) are passages of strangely disjointed editing, which may well be deliberate but which serve to hinder rather than assist the pace of this 'romp'. If you overlook such drawbacks as the somewhat feeble script, then the general ebullience of this 'crazy', star-studded voyage of discovery may win your applause. Tim Robbins turns in a guileless performance as Erik and cameos from John Cleese and Anthony

Sher give some focus to an otherwise disorganised jumble of facts, plot devices and throwaway lines.

De-hard Pythor fans may appreciate this piece of Norse nonsense, but I found the most weird and wonderful aspect to be the fact that the director of *Erik* is the same man who gave us the hilarious *Life of Brian*.

Patience Coster

NIGHTLIFE

Starring: Ben Cross, Maryam D'Abo, Keith Szarabjka
Director: Daniel Taplitz
Distributor: CIC
Cert 15, 90 mins
Rental

Even vampires can make the wrong decisions in love, and boy did Maryam D'Abo drop a clanger when she fell for Ben Cross in sexy but dangerous nineteenth century vampire mode!

Resurrected in the present day she stumbles into a blood bank where Dr Zucerman, played by The Equaliser's Keith Szarabjka, takes a liking to her and decides to study her strange blood virus.



All seems okie-dokie until Vlad (Ben Cross) reappears and does his best to reclaim his love (how the hell could she fall for someone who wears that much hair gel?). He threatens, capotes, makes long speeches about their shared dark ancestry, but when D'Abo shows she's not for turning, he decides to wreak a terrible vengeance.

Despite its star cast, *Nightlife* retells an old story in a generally unfunny way, which is sad, because it's supposed to be a comedy. Ben Cross overacts grossly, while D'Abo is still stuck in James Bond land. Szarabjka shows his typecasting and the director goes for the obvious shot every time.

I really wanted to like *Nightlife*. There's not been a decent vampire film on video since *The Lost Boys* kicked their boots. Still, there's always hope, though not in this lightweight horror.

John Gilbert

HELL MOVES HOUSE

AMITYVILLE 4: THE EVIL ESCAPES

Starring: Patty Duke, Jane Wyatt, Fredric Lehne, Lou Hanoek, Brandy Gold, Ceri Betzler, Aron Eisenberg, Norman Lloyd
Director: Sander Stern
Distributor: Medusa
Cert 15, 90 mins
Rental

As a rule, the sequel game is one of diminishing returns. Box office receipts may go up but the original story concepts begin to stretch with each successive serial number until eventually you can see right through them.

Not so *Amityville 4*. While parts two and three rapidly showed that the controversial plot of the first movie was on a development to nothing, *The Evil Escapes* leaves the house in which family murder has taken place twice, and moves to new lodgings. During a partially successful exorcism the evil flips into a tortured tree-shaped lamp which is bought by an old lady at the house clearance auction. She sends it to her sister but not before she's pricked her finger on the rusty adornments and fallen prey to fatal septicaemia.

The young priest who performed the exorcism eventually tracks down the old lady but, when she dies, he is unable to contact her sister. Sounds sinister? And so it is. The lamp now holds away over the sister and over her daughter who recently moved in after her husband's death bringing with her a young daughter and son.

Strange things begin to happen. Electrical implements malfunction with gory results, the

son runs not with a chainsaw, father appears to be back from the dead, and the young girl becomes possessed by the devil in the lamp. Fortunately, the priest arrives just in time to save the family but not before the evil is passed on in a not altogether unexpected way.

It is not surprising that

Amityville 4 marks a return to the strong dramatic values of the first film. Sander Stern, author of the first film, is back in control and, although the eerie atmosphere prevalent in parts one and two is not as strongly present in this movie, it has sufficient storyline and novelty to recommend it.

John Gilbert



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The Dark Hall - an extract from Stephen King's new novel. Elvira speaks out, author Tannis Lee discusses her own craft, Douglas Winter profile, concept art of Ralph McQuarrie as the set of Nightbreed, Bob Gargen on murder most foul in The Hildebranders, comic book heroes and their transition onto the big screen, James Cameron's The Abyss.

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Jumped! Portraits from Christopher Fowler, Directors Steve Miner and Steve De Jarnett, producer Gabe Benar, author Patrick McGrath, The Return of the Swamp Thing, writer Stephen Lawhead, Robert Englund in Phantom of the Opera, The Exorcist 1999.

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Jonathan Carroll short story, Kim Newman on the Serial Killer: Gabe Benar comics, Roddy McDowall, Sheela-Nation at home, Robert Vaughn, Mike Jeffries, Phantom Zone, Patrick Macnee in The Masque of the Red Death.

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Guy N Smith short story, Robert Bloch, producer Richard P Rubenstein on Stephen King movie adaptations, novelist Mark Morris, Amanda Donohoe, Ralph McQuarrie's Nightbreed drawings, William Friedkin's Roots, Soap and Spectator on A Nightmare on Elm Street, Gabe Benar comics pt 2, FEAR's top thirty horror movies.

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Ian Watson short story, Roy Dotrice in Beauty and the Beast, Richard Matheson, author of The Shrinking Man and Hell House, comic book writing legends Neil Gaiman, FX genius/Reverend/producer, J G Ballard, horror author Richard Layman, carnival movies, new British horror movie, Reviews of Billy the Kid.

FEAR No.15

Sam Raimi on Darkman, at home with Stephen Gallagher, writer/producer Sarah Douglas, J G Ballard, Philip K Dick on the making of Whitley Strieber's Communion, author Adrian Cole, Grant Morrison on Batman comics, The Wolfher released, more Campbell, Fiction from Ramsey Campbell.

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LOVING HAND.

WIZARDS OF OZ

ENCOUNTER AT RAVEN'S GATE

Starring: Steven Vidler,
Celine Griffin, Richie Singer
Director Rolf de Heer
Distributor Castle Premiere
Pictures
Cert 18

Nightmares launched an Aussie invasion of our shores, but now the Australians have an onslaught of their own to worry about, and it's apparently from outer space.

Director Rolf de Heer starts with a truly tense sequence in which an outback cop, gun in clenched fist, investigates the dripping, fire-ravaged wreck of a farmstead. What he discovers there takes us back a couple of days to when the inhabitants Eddie, Richard and Rachel Cleary still live in the house.

The brothers get on OK, although the eldest, Richard is always laying down the law to layabout Eddie, but soon strange things start to happen. Their neighbours' place is destroyed as strange shapes flicker across the sky, the local policeman goes berserk and kills a bar owner because she won't go to the opera with him, and Eddie suddenly



feels a strange compulsion to make it with his brother's wife.

Temper frays, and the tension builds as we learn that some sort of alien force is responsible for the strange events. Eventually, Richard tries to kill his wife and brother, but the strange lights and

sounds intervene, destroying everything in their path.

Encounter At Raven's Gate could be classified as a typical UFO encounter were it not for outstanding performances by a cast of relative unknowns, beautiful camerawork, and the

way in which the writers, Marc Rosenberg and Rolf de Heer, maintain tension while keeping the source of alien interference a mysterious secret. It's well worth a watch, even if you're tired of the Aussie invasion.
John Gilbert



DOES YOUR life lack surprise and excitement?
DO YOU look over your shoulder and see nothing but your own shadow?
ARE YOUR dreams peaceful and uninterrupted?
IS THE tedium driving you crazy?

FEAR NOT

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FEAR

MEETS VAMPIRE LA

● **FEAR** (UK) has been looking for the seductive appeal of the vampire in its new horror series, *Vampire La*, set in a haunted castle.

● **CHILD'S PLAY** The return of the masochist reveals the secrets behind the story.

● **SANDOR STORIES** author of the original *Amityville Horror*, returns to the evil into another terrifying world, *Amityville 4: The Evil Escapes*.

● **STORM** CONNOR SMITH, who is trying to be outrageous with his new book, *When the Gods with Us*, is also a member of the *FEAR* family.

● **MALE MURDER** the author of *Deadly Warts* and *Off*.

CONTRIBUTORS

● **MALE MURDER** the author of *Deadly Warts* and *Off*.

● **WOLF** (UK) has a rich and varied meeting with the *FEAR* family.

FEAR ISSUE
No. 17
ON SALE
APRIL 23

The Spook takes time out from cookin' in the kitchen to read some of your better letters . . .

Well, look what the black cat dragged in. You must be soaked. That hill out there's usually baked dry in the summer but, in the winter . . . well, my old place seems to draw the storms . . . kek . . . and the draughts.

We've met before, perhaps. We haven't? Well, maybe you don't recall. I wrote a few columns for those *FEAR* folks back in their first year of publication. Thought people loved me too, but the editorial department had other things in mind, like film reports . . . Couldn't see that I was pleasing the masses. Y'know, the only way they could drag me back was to put a modern link into my house and let me relax on my old chaise longue while I read your letters.

First one this month's from some dude angry about censorship . . . sort of introductory offer from Paul Poy of Glasgow . . . kek . . .

Dear Spook

'As most of your readers are probably aware, Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* was recently given its first showing on British television - almost nine years after its cinema release. I'm not sure of the reasons for the delay but I believe it had something to do with disgust on the part of the television bosses because there are quite a few naughty words spoken by Jack Nicholson.

I didn't actually watch it on the night it was screened, but instead taped it. The reason I had to tape it was because all interest in my household was focused on a live boxing match that was being screened on another channel.

This 'match' consisted of two coloured men beating the crap out of each other in front of a predominantly white audience. That cuddly commentator, Harry Carpenter spoke with great excitement of the 'glorious punches' being thrown, and the crowd became somewhat aroused by all that live violence. Still, all good fun, eh? Not at all like that horror stuff we stickos indulge in. The popular newspapers are always keen to point out the blood and guts in the crap out of the blood and guts type of movie, and they say they corrupt - so surely it must be so?

'We human beings are in possession of something called an aggressive instinct, and in today's civilised society we need ways of releasing the tension built up inside by the repression of this instinct. And as I've read about it so often it must be the case that watching horror films doesn't help people cope with their anti-social feelings by giving them a good scare and a giggle, knowing that what they are watching is only make believe and that no one has been hurt. Oh no! These movies turn the viewers into

depraved deviants who develop the most unsavoury habits. Not like our normal, healthy citizens who find a release by watching sport. Okay, so every week we have trouble at a few of the football grounds, but you have to expect a bit of trouble at these things.

I fear I may be becoming depraved, for it seems to me that the acquaintances of mine who also share an interest in horror films and fiction are well-balanced folk with lively imaginations whose range of interests reaches far beyond just horror. And as this seems to me to be a good thing there must be something wrong with me. Or could it be that this country is full of amateur psychologists who have mastered the art of talking through that small part of the body normally reserved for disposing of excrement and producing nasty smells?

'Myself! I have no qualifications to back up my opinions, but until we have running street battles after screenings of the latest horror flicks I think I'll stick to them.

'Oh, and congratulations to Frank Bruno on receiving the OBE for his 'contributions to boxing'.

Well, I wouldn't disagree with you there, at least not about boxing, but don't you think you might be calling on the converted? As the good book says, 'Go amongst the people and preach the message, and take an axe along with you while you're at it. And now, for something completely different, Jack Warner from *Ashby-de-la-Zouch* wants to stretch the boundaries of horror . . .

Dear Spook

'I'm coming to the conclusion that quite a few novels that publishers classify as mainstream or thrillers come within the sphere of psychological horror. Both Patricia Highsmith and Ruth Rendell have written work of this type.

'I've recently read two novels; *The Samaritan* and *The Refuge* by Chaz Brenchley. Both books are published as mainstream novels by Hodder and Stoughton, but both could easily be classified as horror.

'I think we should treat publishers' classifications with some scepticism, and that *FEAR* should include books like *The Samaritan* in its reviews.

Not that you should neglect bread-and-butter horror books. I do hope you'll be commenting on *The 30th Pan Book Of Horror Stories*, for example. The fact that it contains two of my stories is purely coincidental.

I'm assured by the *Ed* that *FEAR* will be including more psychological horror from the likes of Ruth Rendell and even V.C. Andrews sorry



soon. As for the *PRHS* number 30, I'll make a special effort to sort . . . er, search you out.

Dear FEAR

In issue 13 I read a short story by a young author, Nicole Germain. My feelings are that this young lady is to be congratulated on her writing ability, and how surprising it was to me that such a pleasant smiling young person could be gifted with the depth of perception that could produce the story *Caroline Hunter*.

Ask her to keep up the good work.
Anne Wadsworth, Bassett, Hants

Dear FEAR

Who says you're wasting pages with short stories?

Perhaps those who complain should think of the story section as a free supplement. *FEAR* deserves to be congratulated for its policy of giving new writers a stage. As one of this genus, the short stories are my reason for buying the magazine and I'm sure there are many like me. Each month I can read about the writers and assess their talent in relation to my assessment of my own. What worries me, however, is the quality of the stories; it's a mite poor. Does this reflect the quality of new writers, or the inability of *FEAR* to differentiate between a good story and a bad one?

Anyhow - so readers want big names, who can blame them? But won't even the most ardent admirer get sick of eternally recycled Stephen King and Clive Barker? You've got the blend just about right. You've given the little guy a break and today's little guy is tomorrow's big guy. I'm sure 'hat the Kings and Barkers of tomorrow won't forget their debt to *FEAR*.

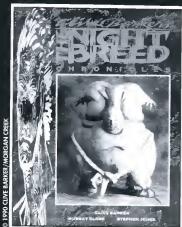
D Logan, Co Antrim, N Ireland

Yes, the quality of stories depends upon submissions, but you've got to remember that these people are on the first stair, and several have gone on to garner the interest of editors in both the UK and USA.

If you want to be verbally abused send your letters to **RAISING THE DEAD, FEAR, NEWSFIELD, LUDLOW, SHROPSHIRE SY8 1JW**.

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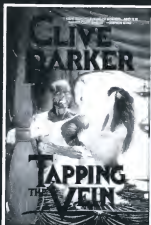
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